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BIBLE CHARACTERS

An account of the world in this one single view as God's world.

BUTLER.

BIBLE CHARACTERS

GIDEON TO ABSALOM

BY

ALEXANDER WHYTE, D.D.

AUTHOR OF 'BUNYAN CHARACTERS'

'LANCELOT ANDREWES AND HIS PRIVATE

DEVOTIONS' 'FATHER JOHN'

ETC. ETC.



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BIBLE CHARACTERS

XXVII

GIDEON

*YE DID RUN WELL; WHO
DID HINDER YOU?*



WE are not told to whom we are indebted for the Book of The Judges, but whoever he was, he was a master of the pen, and the story of Gideon is his masterpiece. A powerfully built, middle-aged man of Manasseh is busy beating out a few blasted ears of corn in a secret winepress. He beats the sheaves softly lest the sound of his staff should tell the Midianites where the wheat is. He stops his work to dry his face and to wet his lips, but all the water in the well would not put out the fire that is in his eye, for the fire that is in his eye is his hot heart rising to heaven against the oppressors of his people. 'The Lord is with thee,' the angel of the Lord appeared at that moment and said to Gideon, 'for thou art a mighty man of valour.' Gideon thought that the angel of the Lord was mocking at him in so speaking. The Lord with me! and I have not meal enough to make my children's supper! I a mighty man of valour, when I am afraid to thrash out my few

stalks of wheat on the thrashing-floor, but must hide myself in this hidden winepress ! Call me not a mighty man of valour. Call me a God-forsaken coward ! But the angel of the Lord only the more went on, 'Go in this thy might and thou shalt save Israel.'

No sooner had the angel of the Lord taken his departure than Gideon threw down his staff and went into the house where his mother sat mourning day and night for the loss of her sons slain at Tabor, each one resembling the son of a king. And Gideon said to his weeping mother, 'Awake, my mother, and sing to me the song of Deborah.' And while she only the more sat and wept, her son took out and whetted his sword and sharpened his axe. 'Sing to me,' he said, 'how Deborah and Barak arose and delivered Israel. Sing to me, ye daughters of Joash, of how the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.' Night fell ; and at midnight, behold ten men, and each man with a pitcher and a lamp in it in his left hand, and with his axe in his right hand, stole out of his house and met Gideon. Their meeting was beside the altar of Baal and in the grove of Baal, which was built and planted in Joash's high place. For, how could Joash's son think to cast out a single Midianite as long as that unclean altar and those unclean trees stood beside his father's house ? He could not. But at every blow of Gideon's swift axe new strength came into his arm. At every tree that fell before his axe his courage rose. And the light of God's countenance returned already to Israel in every star that shone down through the

opening spaces in the grove of Baal. Why is *your* life in such bondage and fear and famine to-night? Why have you not been fed to-day and every day with the finest of the wheat? Why are you not satisfied every day with honey out of the rock? Arise in this thy might, and the Lord will make of thee also a mighty man of valour. Be sure of this, that thy sure way to deliverance and peace and plenty lies for thee also through that levelled grove and over that prostrate altar.

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.

The worshippers of Baal never neglected their morning devotions. 'Early will I seek thee,' they could say to their god with truth and a good conscience. And thus it was that before Joash was up that morning the men of the city were gathered already round his door, shouting and demanding, and saying,—'Bring out thy son Gideon that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove of Baal.' Many men who have not the courage to do a righteous deed themselves have the sense and the grace to be glad when other men do it. And sometimes you will see a father who is entangled in some evil or doubtful business, but has not the courage or the strength to cut himself and his house clear of it, a proud enough father when his son rises up and sets the whole household free. A vein of true humour ran in the Joash blood; for that morning

the old man met the men of the city with a jest that scattered them all home, just as Gideon his son has enriched our literature to this day with more than one witty word and ready and racy answer. 'For shame!' said Joash, 'for shame, sirs! Stand back, and go home. Let Baal redress his own wrongs. Baal is a god: and you are only my everyday neighbours. Let Baal arise, but go you home.' And Joash brought out Gideon and baptized him Jerubbaal before them all, saying, 'Let Baal settle his own scores with my sacrilegious son.' 'Let her ladyship now save herself,' said John Knox, as he cast the wooden idol overboard. 'She is light enough; let her learn to swim.' After that, we read, was no Scottish man ever urged with that idolatry.

Gideon was a great favourite with Pascal. Gideon's fleece had taken a great hold of Pascal's imagination. You all know the fine story of Gideon's fleece. Gideon was a humble-minded man. Not Moses himself was a more humble-minded man than Gideon was, or more unwilling to come out and be a great man before Israel. 'Oh, my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.' But, had Gideon not been poor in Manasseh, and the least in his father's house, God would have gone elsewhere for a leader to deliver Israel. And this is always the way of the Lord with men who are to do a great work for Him and for His people—'to that man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembleth at My word.'

And God said to Gideon, What sign shall I show thee to assure and to confirm thee that thou art he who shall deliver Israel? And the quaint fancy of Gideon fell on a sheep's fleece now wet and now dry when all around it was now dry and now wet. A strange, indeed a fantastic, request to make of God. But, all the same, Gideon made it and got it. 'Is there humour in the divine mind?' asked one of his congenial students at Dr. Duncan, instancing, at the same time, what looked to him like some examples of something not unlike humour both in creation and in providence. 'It's true and it's no true,' was the old doctor's answer. And God did so that night; for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground. You have the whole story from 'a pen that ennobles and idealises all that it touches.' But you may not have read this addition from another pen, that Gideon's mother took that so versatile fleece of his, and cut it out, and sewed it up with her own hands into a soldier's mantle for her elect son: a mantle which he wore under his armour and next his heart in all his after-battles; and his men always witnessed that Gideon with his fleece on was full of hope when they were full of despair; and again, that he was full of a good captain's caution and forethought when they would have gone headlong to their own destruction. How often I wish with all the world that Pascal had been spared to develop his Thoughts and finish his Apology. What lessons I could then have read you out of Gideon's wonderful fleece! Pascal must have had something great in his mind about Gideon,

for we see him taking down Gideon's name in his notebook again and again. But, as we know, Pascal did not live to digest his rich notebook into the great book of his life.

But it is time to come to Gideon's three hundred Ironsides, so to call them. Not a man of Colonel Cromwell's soldiers swears but he pays his twelfthpence. No drinking, no disorders, no plundering, no impiety permitted. They were men that had the fear of God in them, and that made them put away all other fear. 'Truly they were never beaten at all,' boasted their colonel. 'My troops increase,' he wrote to his friend, Oliver St. John. 'I have a lovely company; you would respect them did you know them. They are no anabaptists. They are honest, sober, Christian men; and they expect to be used like men. The result was I raised such men as had the fear of God before them; such men as made conscience of what they did; and from that day forward they were never beaten, but wherever they were engaged against the enemy they beat continually. And truly this is matter of praise to God, and it hath some instruction in it.' You see, then, what an Ironside was. An Ironside was a soldier whose whole soul was ribbed and plated all round with sound morals and true religion. Colonel Cromwell's Ironsides were that, and so were Judge Gideon's. And Gideon's three hundred has still some instruction in it, as Cromwell says. And one of these instructions is this, that three hundred good and true men are far better for a great campaign of truth and right-

eousness than ten thousand men swept together by chance conscription, or picked up for a shilling a head in a public-house. The men are too many, said the Lord to Gideon. And the Lord took one of Gideon's own original and characteristic ways of weeding out that army of deliverance. The day was hot, and the ten thousand came to a river on their march. Their fathers in leaving Egypt had eaten their last supper without taking off their hats or their shoes. They ate that memorable supper standing, with a piece of the Passover lamb in one hand and with their staff in the other. And three hundred of Gideon's men out of the ten thousand remembered that supper that day, and they swore to themselves and to one another that they would not sit down to eat bread at a table, nor so much as lie down to drink water out of a river, so long as there was a single Midianite left alive in the land. And thus it was that without even taking off their helmets, the three hundred wet their lips out of the hollow of their hand, and were back again that moment in their unbroken ranks. As for Gideon, the dew glistening on his mother's mantle was water enough for him that day. 'Alexander, being parched with thirst in the desert, took the helmet full of water, but perceiving that the men of arms that were about him did thrust out their necks to look upon this water, he gave it back again unto them that had given it unto him, and thanked them, but drank none of it. For, said he, if I drink alone all these men here will faint. And what wonder if his men began to spur their horses, say-

ing that they were not weary nor athirst, nor did think themselves mortal as long as they had such a king.' And all the best work and all the best warfare of the world is done still as it was done in Manasseh and in Macedonia; it is done by those men who are more intent on their work than on their wages: who think more about their armour than about their rations: who eat less that they may work more: and who lap up a mouthful and lose not a moment as they dash on to meet the enemy away past every running water.

But time would fail me to tell you all about Gideon: all about his battles, and all about his victories: about how he behaved himself in battle, and how he bore himself in victory. Like the Ironsides of England, the Ironsides of Israel said to their captain, 'Rule thou over us, for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.' But Gideon said, 'I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord only shall rule over you.' And had Gideon only stopped there, what a noble name, and what a blameless name Gideon's name would have been to us to this day! But:

The grey-hair'd saint may fail at last,
The surest guide a wanderer prove;
Death only binds us fast
To the bright shore of love.

I have seen
The thorn frown rudely all the winter long,
And after bear the rose upon its top;
And bark, that all the way across the sea
Ran straight and speedy, perish at the last,
E'en in the haven's mouth.

And Gideon was that grey-haired saint ; that sure guide ; he was that straight and speedy bark.

‘Rule thou over us,’ said all the soldiers and all the people. And Gideon said unto them, ‘I will not rule over you. But,’ he went on—and as he went on the devil entered into Gideon and he went on—‘I would desire a request of you that you would give me every man the earrings of his prey.’ And Gideon made an ephod of the earrings and put it in his city, even in Ophra ; and all Israel went a-whoring after it, which thing became a snare to Gideon, and to all his house. It must have been the very devil himself. There is no other way of accounting for this terrible catastrophe. The devil has seldom since his first success had such another success over God and God’s servants as he had in Gideon’s awful fall. For Gideon, when he died, and long before he died, left Israel very much where he had found her when he cut down his father’s unclean grove and overthrew his father’s lewd altar. Gideon left Israel under the heel of her oppressors ; or if not that just yet, then fast and sure on the way to that. Gideon’s great mistake, Gideon’s great crime, Gideon’s great sin, and Satan’s great triumph over Gideon all arose out of this, that all through his magnificent life of service, in Paul’s words, the law of Moses, the law of God, had never entered Gideon’s heart. In Paul’s words, again, Gideon did not know what sin was. He knew suffering in plenty ; but, shallow old soldier as he was, he did not know the secret of all suffering. Gideon was as ignorant as the mass of you are what

God's law really is, what sin really is, and what the only cure of sin really is. At bottom, and in New Testament words, that was Gideon's fall. And accordingly Gideon made a mock ephod at Ophra, while all the time God had made a true and sure ephod both for Himself and for Gideon and for all Israel at Shiloh. And God's ephod had an altar connected with it, and a sacrifice for sin, and the blood of sprinkling, and the pardon of sin, and a clean heart, and a new life ; all of which Israel so much needed, but all of which Gideon, with all his high services, knew nothing about. Sin was the cause of all the evil that Gideon in his bravery had all his life been battling with ; but, instead of going himself, and taking all his Ironsides and all his people up with him to God's house against sin, Gideon set up a sham house of God of his own, and a sham service of God of his own, with the result to himself and to Israel that the sacred writer puts in such plain words. Think of Gideon, of all men in Israel, leading all Israel a-whoring away from God ! The pleasure-loving people came up to Gideon's pleasure-giving ephod, when both he and they should have gone to God's penitential ephod. They forgot all about the Midianites as they came up to Ophra to eat and to drink and to dance. Whereas, had they been well and wisely led, they would have gone to Shiloh with the Midianites 'ever before them,' till the God of Israel would have kept the Midianites and all their other enemies for ever away from them. Gideon was a splendid soldier, but he was a very short-sighted priest. He put on a costly ephod

indeed, but it takes a great deal more than a costly ephod to make a prevailing priest. Gideon could hew down the enemies of Israel by the thousand ; but, all the time, he was doing absolutely nothing to heal the real hurt of the daughter of his people. Gideon could not possibly heal that hurt as long as he did not know what it was nor where it lay.

Your time would not wait for me to make all the application. But, surely, there can be no need ; if you have half an eye in your head you must long before now have made the application for yourself. I see, and you must see, men every day who are as brave and as bold as Gideon, and as full of anger and revenge against all the wrongs and all the miseries of their fellow-men ; men and women who take their lives in their hands to do battle with ignorance and vice and all the other evils that the land lies under : and, all the time, they go on repeating Gideon's fatal mistake ; till, at the end of their life, they leave all these wrongs and miseries very much as they found them : nothing better, but rather worse. And all because they set up an ephod of their own devising in the place of the ephod and the altar and the sacrifice and the intercession that God has set up for these and all other evils. They say, and in their goodness of heart they do far more than merely say,—What shall the poor eat, and what shall they drink, and how shall they be housed ? At great cost to themselves they put better houses for the working classes, and places of refreshment and amusement, and reading-rooms, and libraries, and baths, and open spaces, and

secular schools and still more secular churches in the room of the cross and the church and the gospel of Jesus Christ; and they complain that the Midianites do not remove but come back faster than they can chase them out. But, as Joash or Gideon might have said in one of their humorous moments, all these things are so many apothecary's pills to protect a man from the earthquake. Only, there is much more fitness and sense and likelihood in the mountebank's prescription than there is in all your costly but unchristian ephods. Either the cross of Christ was an excess and a superfluity, or your expensive but maladroit nostrums for sin are an insult to Him and to His cross. . . . It only remains to say that from that day on which Gideon put on his ephod of earrings, his mantle which his mother made ceased to move on his bosom and to speak to his heart. From that day his mantle was no longer the miraculous fleece of his great days of victory; from that day and thenceforth it was only the dead skin of a dead sheep.

XXVIII

JEPHTHAH AND HIS DAUGHTER

*IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN THAT
HE BEAR THE YOKE IN HIS
YOUTH*

‘**P**ROSPERITY,’ says Bacon, ‘is the blessing of the Old Testament, but adversity is the blessing of the New.’ ‘How many saints,’ exclaims Law, ‘has adversity sent to heaven! And how many poor sinners has prosperity plunged into everlasting misery! This man had never been debauched, but for his fortune and advancement; that had never been pious, but through his poverty and disgrace. She that is envied for her beauty may perchance owe all her misery to it, and another may be for ever happy for having no admirers of her person. One man succeeds in everything, and so loses all; another meets with nothing but crosses and disappointments, and thereby gains more than all the world is worth.’ ‘Adversity,’ says Albert Bengel, ‘transfers our affections to Christ.’ ‘Caius Martius,’ says Plutarch, ‘being left an orphan of his father, was brought up under his mother, a widow, and he has taught us by his experience that orphanage brings many disadvantages to a child, but does

not hinder him from becoming an honest man, or from excelling in virtues above the common sort.'

Jephthah the Gileadite was the most ill-used man in all the Old Testament, and he continues to be the most completely misunderstood, misrepresented, and ill-used man down to this day. Jephthah's ill-usage began before he was born, and it has continued down to the last Old Testament Commentary and the last Bible Dictionary that treats of Jephthah's name. The iron had entered Jephthah's soul while yet he lay in his mother's womb; and both his father and his brothers and the elders of Israel helped forward Jephthah's affliction, till the Lord rose up for Jephthah and said, It is enough; took the iron out of His servant's soul, and poured oil and wine into the life-long wound. Born, like his great Antitype, under a cloud, Jephthah, like his great Antitype also, was made perfect through suffering. Buffeted about from his birth by his brothers; trampled upon by all men, but most of all by the men of his father's house; called all manner of odious and exasperating names; his mother glad to get the servants' leavings for herself and her son; when a prophet came to dine, sent away to the fields to be out of sight; My son, his mother said, as she died on her bed of straw among Gilead's oxen—My son, shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And from that day, if earth had been hell to Jephthah before, the one drop of water that had hitherto cooled his tormented heart was now spilt to him for ever, never to be gathered up again. For his mother was dead.

If at the death of his father Jephthah had got his proper portion of his father's goods, then Jephthah might have become as great a prodigal as his brothers became. But the loss of an earthly inheritance was to Jephthah, as it has been to so many men since his day, the gaining of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, eternal in the heavens.

And Gilead's wife bore him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, 'Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house, for thou art the son of a strange woman.' Then Jephthah fled from his brethren and dwelt in the land of Tob; and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, who went out with him. 'Vain men'; yes; no doubt. But, then, we must remember that misery has always acquainted even the best of men with strange bedfellows. David's misery acquainted him with every one that was in debt, and with every one that was in distress, and with every one that was discontented, and he became a captain over them, as did Jephthah long before David's day. You must not sit in your soft chair and shake your head over Jephthah and David. They were not all highwaymen; they were not all unmitigated freebooters either in Adullam or in Tob. They were not unlike those Armenians or Greeks who have taken to the hills in our day against the Turks. Still, we must stand to the text; and it is to Jephthah's advantage that we do so stand. Yes; fill the mountain-fastnesses of Tob as full as they can hold of vain men, and their captain's

true character will only all that the better come out. Debtors, broken men, injured and outcast men, orphan and illegitimate sons, prodigal sons, and sons with whom their fathers were wearied out; with, no doubt, a sprinkling of salt here and there, as there always is among the most corrupt characters and the most abandoned men. But, bad as they were, Jephthah turned none of them away, but took them all the more into his own hand. I told you Whose type Jephthah was, and Who was his Antitype. And thus it was that he took that great rabble of refuse and of offscourings, and year after year gradually chastised them into an army of obedient and capable men. He took them to his own cave man by man, to sup with himself and to talk with himself. He listened to their story, and they listened to his. He told them what he would give them to do, and what he would give them for doing it. He made them captains over tens and over fifties and over hundreds. He trusted them, he praised them, he promoted them. And then he hurled them like a stone cut out of the mountain against the enemies of the King of Tob; till the elders of Israel in their absolute despair were compelled to approach and to beseech Jephthah to come down from his fastness and rid them of their enemies also.

It was a bitter pill to those elders of Israel. Some of the prouder stomachs among them would have died rather than swallow it. The stone which the builders had refused was become the head stone of the corner; and it broke every bone in their

body to lift that stone up into its place. You know how you hate and fear and shrink back from meeting, not to speak of being beholden for your life to, the man or woman you once greatly injured. You will know, then, what it was to be an elder in Israel in that day and among the hills of Tob. Their hearts were as black as hell with remorse and with terror as they approached Jephthah's dreadful den and saw his naked savages glowering at them through their spears. Look at that poor elder of Israel of eighty. His old face is as white as his old hair. An old man like that should not be out on an errand like this. He drinks at every stream. He falls down with fear at every breath of wind. Who, you ask, is that so venerable figure they have placed at the head of the sacred deputation? Oh, that, you must know, is the ruling elder, to whose door Jephthah went in his despair when his mother was dying in Gilead's stable. That is the hand, so helpless to-day, that shut the door so sternly in Jephthah's face that day. That is the mouth, so dry to-day, that was so full of such evil names at Jephthah that day. And he would never have got through his mission to Tob that day unless Jephthah had made his daughter spread out some venison on a shelf of a rock and pour out some of the old wine of their mountains. That old elder's sin found him out that day, when the sweetest woman-child he had ever seen washed his feet, and anointed his head, and kissed his outstretched and deprecating hand. Jephthah's daughter shall never wash my feet! the old man had said; but she both washed

his feet and kissed them too, in her beautiful honour to old age. Jephthah would have been more than a mere man, as, indeed, he sometimes was, if he had not reminded those elders of the old days. Only, if the deputation had had any sense; if they had not been so many idiots; if all their tongues had not been cleaving to the roofs of their mouths over Jephthah's hospitality and his daughter's devotion, they would surely have taken the upbraiding words out of his mouth. What a pity it is that Jephthah did not hold himself in to the end of the interview! What a lesson he would then have been to us in the New Testament art of taming an injured tongue! But let him who has always tamed his own tongue in Jephthah's opportunity cast the first stone at Gilead's disinherited and cast-out son. At the same time, Jephthah soon put a bridle on his mouth, and that lest his old wrongs should set sudden fire to what he knew was only waiting the match in the hearts of his men. And he was very glad when he got all those elders of Israel safely out of Tob and back again within the borders of their own land. He was angry with himself all down the long hill-road that he had ever told those wild men one word about the days of his youth. But by quick marchings and by strict orders Jephthah got his bodyguard held in till all danger was past.

THE LORD dwelt in those days at Mizpeh; THE LORD had a house and an altar at Mizpeh; and Jephthah opened all that was in his heart; past injury, present opportunity, and future surrender

and service before THE LORD at Mizpeh. This is what we mean by masterly writing, sacred or profane. This: 'Jephthah uttered all his words before THE LORD in Mizpah.' The truly masterly part was in Jephthah himself. But it is not every masterly part that gets such a masterly reporter. 'Before THE LORD,' I am much afraid, is only so much pen and ink to you even when it stands in these reader-arresting capitals. But, to Jephthah, Mizpeh was all that the Mount was to Moses when THE LORD descended there with His great Name. Tob, and Mizpeh, and all, were full of THE LORD and all His Attributes to Jephthah. I expect to read in *The Athenæum* or *The Academy* some Saturday night soon that the land of Tob has been discovered and identified, and Jephthah's headquarters in it, with Exodus thirty-fourth and sixth and seventh still legible on its doorpost. Perhaps Dryasdust will then begin to open his eyes over his ordered article on Jephthah. Only, if they had been made to open they would surely have opened long ago at the last clause of the eleventh verse of the eleventh chapter of Jephthah's history. Time has failed me to make an exhaustive induction over the whole of the Old Testament, but I have a conviction that 'The Name of THE LORD occurs oftener in Jephthah's history than it does in the history of any other Old Testament saint, at any rate between the days of Moses and those of David. If the Name and Presence of THE LORD is the supreme distinction in any man's life and history, Old Testament or New, prosperity or adversity, then he that runs might

surely have read in that Jephthah's character and Jephthah's standing in the true Israel. How I wish this fine narrator had taken time to tell us down to every jot and tittle all that Jephthah said and did when he uttered all his words before THE LORD at Mizpeh! Were this sacred writer on the earth in our day, and were he recasting his Judges in the light of the New Testament, I feel sure he would give us all Jephthah's words before THE LORD at Mizpeh, and that verbatim too, even if he had to leave out the Levite and his concubine. But this sacred writer knew his own business, and I can well believe it of him that he buried Jephthah's words before THE LORD at Mizpeh out of sight in order that we might have to dig for those words as for hid treasure—the hid treasure of the kingdom of heaven, as Jephthah had been taught by his mother about that kingdom, and had already taken, and will soon still more take, that kingdom by force.

Along with Jephthah we have Jephthah's father, and his mother, and his brothers, and the elders of Israel, and the King of Ammon, and Jephthah's daughter, and the daughters of Israel—but we have not one word about Jephthah's wife. Richard Owen, the great anatomist, from a few inches of fossil bone constructed a complete creature of a long past and forgotten world, and made it live and go about again before us. And from a few words of her daughter I can see and understand that nameless princess of the land of Tob better than I can see and understand some men and women who live next door to me. I conclude the long-

dead mother from a single glimpse of her noble daughter. I see the mother of Jephthah's daughter the light of Jephthah's eyes in the dark cave of Tob. Those terrified elders owed their life that day to her. It was her love and her life and her death that so softened and so reconciled her husband. 'Yes,' she said to her father, after Jephthah had delivered her father's city,—'Yes, I will go with this man.' And when her daughter was born in Adullam that finished her work on her husband's savage soldiers. Always lions in war, they were now lambs in peace. 'My father,' said her daughter, long after her mother was dead and buried among her father's hills,—'My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto THE LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth.' No, there can be no doubt at all about the mother of Jephthah's daughter. Moses had laid down a law that Jephthah was never to get a wife out of any family in Israel, nor was he ever to be let worship God in the same house with the virtuous elders of Israel. But men like Jephthah are above all such laws, and they break through them all as a lion breaks through a hedge. For Jephthah got of THE LORD in Tob a better wife and a better daughter too, than were to be seen in all Israel from Dan to Beersheba. And as for their tabernacle, he took it by storm, or, if not it, then that temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Pericles' mother dreamed one night that she was brought to bed of a lion. And Jephthah's mother again and again had the same dream.

After all that, it does not at all upset me to read that Jephthah built an altar and offered up his daughter. That was their terrible way sometimes in those twilight, uncivilised, and unevangelical ages. What God bade Abraham and Isaac do on Moriah, that Jephthah and his daughter actually did at Mizpeh. No doubt, had God sent an angel and provided a ram, Jephthah and his daughter would have returned home together willingly enough. But God did better for Jephthah and his daughter than He did for Abraham and Isaac, and both Abraham and Isaac in their old age would have been the first to admit it. The finished work of this earthly life of fathers, and mothers, and sons, and daughters, is to hold them all as not ours but God's. It is really of little consequence in what age of the world, or in what dispensation of providence, patriarchal, Mosaic, pagan, or Christian, or just in what way, and just among what things, the mind and the heart and the will of Jephthah and Jesus Christ are worked out within us—If only they are worked out within us.

The one question is, Am I or am I not my own? Am I bought with a price or am I not? In all that do I not sin, nor charge God foolishly? In all that do I say, Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me? You take a right step. You take up a holy calling. You enter a holy covenant. You open your mouth to the Lord, and you put your hand to His holy plough. And, come what may, you never go back. You only all the more say, I will pay my vow. Thy will be done. My

times are in Thy hand. The cup, shall I not drink it? All I have is Thine, said Jephthah. I had nothing. I had not even a name to be known by. No man would let me sit at his table. No mother would let me look at her daughter. No elder in Israel but spat in my face. It is all Thine. I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid; Thou hast loosed my bonds. Take it all back again if Thou seest good; only let me redeem Thy people Israel. And God took Jephthah at his word, till wherever the Book of the Judges of Israel is read this that Jephthah and his daughter did shall be told for a memorial of them. And it was a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went to that altar once every year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year. And they came back from that altar to be far better daughters than they went out. They came back softened, and purified, and sobered at heart. They came back ready to die for their fathers, and for their brothers, and for their husbands, and for their God. Weep not for me, Jephthah's daughter said to them from off her altar and from out of heaven. Weep for yourselves and for your children.

And that the very fragments of such a history may be gathered up, and may not be lost, we are let read this on the margin—That though Jephthah had neither wife, nor son, nor daughter of his own any more, yet his palace at Mizpeh was only all that the more replenished and full of people. Old soldiers from the fastnesses of Tob were pensioned in that palace; prodigal sons worked in its fields; illegiti-

mate sons sat at its table ; foundling children played upon its doorsteps ; nephews of its owner, the debauched sons of the rich brothers of his youth, became honest men—what between their uncle's house and the house of the Lord beside it. Long ago, when Jephthah first uttered his words before the Lord at Mizpeh, he read these words on the wall of that altar. These words : The Lord your God regardeth not persons, nor taketh rewards. He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and the widow ; He loveth the stranger, and giveth him food and raiment. Love ye, therefore, the stranger, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. And many of the sons of the elders of Israel ate the fat and drank the sweet at Jephthah's orphaned table, because of what Jephthah had read long ago on the Lord's wall at Mizpeh. For six years this life for others went on with Jephthah. He buried his grief as much as he might in warfare for Israel and in labours in her seat of judgment and among her outcasts, till he died in Mizpeh in midtime of his days. For he said, They shall not return to me, but I shall go to them, and so died.

XXIX

SAMSON

*EVERY MAN THAT STRIVETH
FOR THE MASTERY IS TEM-
PERATE IN ALL THINGS*



SAMSON'S tragical story has been treated in three ways. Some commentators on the Book of Judges have treated the story of Samson as an excellent piece of Hebrew folklore. They have collected out of all the ancient books of the world wonderful tales of giants, and heroes, and demigods, with their astonishing feats of strength in war, and in love, and in jealousy, and in revenge; feats more or less like the feats of strength and of revenge we have in Samson. They have produced remarkable parallels to Samson's exploits out of Atlas and Cyclops, Hercules and Odin, and many suchlike mythological characters. And then their work on Samson has been done when they have illustrated his history with romances and legends of sufficient likeness and richness. Some evangelical preachers, again, have gone out to the opposite extreme, and have displayed Samson to us solely as a type and pattern of Jesus Christ. They have selected texts out of Samson's extraordinary history, and they have suspended excellent New Testament

sermons on these adapted texts; hanging great weights on small wires. The former is the mythical way of dealing with Samson's history; the latter is the mystical way. But there is a third way. And the third way is the way that Paul takes, not only with Samson, but with all the patriarchs, and judges, and kings, and great men of Old Testament times. We have this apostle's way with all those Old Testament men and women set before us again and again in his own conclusive words: 'For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.' And again, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' And again, 'Now, all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' And yet again, 'Therefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.' Now, neither the mythical nor the mystical method shall be followed upon Samson to-night. All my leanings and all my drawings, all my reading and all my experience—all combine to make me to sit at Paul's feet, and to pursue, so far as I am able, Paul's expository and homiletical methods. While listening attentively, then, to all that the mythologists

and the mystics have to say on Samson ; having done so, I feel all the more safe and sure in asking you to look at Samson as John Milton looked at Samson when he treated him with such ‘verisimilitude and decorum.’ For ‘Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems : therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and suchlike passions ; that is, to temper and reduce the passions to their just measure.’

What more could God, or man, or angel of God have done for Samson that was not done ? Every man must work out his own salvation with his own hands, or not at all ; but, short of doing for Samson what neither God nor man could do, what more could God or man have done that was not done ? From his birth, and for long before his birth, the gifts of God were simply showered on Samson. He had a father and a mother of the very best. Over and above what the Bible tells us about Samson’s father and mother, Josephus, in supplement of the Bible, tells us that there was ‘one Manoah, a person of such virtue that he had few men his equals, and without dispute he was the principal person in his country. And Manoah had a wife celebrated for her beauty, and excelling her contemporaries.’ Now, Manoah and his wife had been prepared to be the father and mother of a great deliverer of Israel. And they had been prepared in the same way that God had often taken to prepare the parents of those children who were predestinated to be great

and famous men. Like Abraham and Sarah, like Isaac and Rebekah, like Jacob and Rachel, like Hannah, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, and like many more, it was as it were by a special and immediate act of creative power that Manoah and his wife got Samson their son at the hand of God.

And not only was Samson to be separated to God's service from his mother's womb; but, in order to make his separation and dedication both sure and easy and natural to him, his mother was separated and dedicated to God long before her child was born. 'Of all that I said to the woman let her beware. She may not eat of anything that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine nor strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe,' said the angel of the Lord a second time to Manoah. 'Not,' says Joseph Hall, 'that there is more uncleanness in the grape than in the fountain; but that wine finds more uncleanness in us than water finds; and that the high feed is not so fit for devotion as abstinence.'

Desire of wine and all delicious drinks,
Which many a famous warrior overturns,
Thou couldst repress; nor did the dancing ruby,
Sparkling, outpour'd, the flavour, or the smell
Or taste that cheers the heart of gods and men,
Allure thee from the clear crystalline stream:

. . . . Nor envied them the grape,
Whose heads that turbulent liquor fills with fumes.

But what avail'd this temperance not complete
Against another object more enticing?
What boots it at one gate to make defence,
And at another to let in the foe,
Effeminately vanquished?

‘I am weary of my life!’ said Rebekah to Isaac over the marriage of Esau, and in terror of a like marriage of Jacob. And both Manoah and his wife said the same thing over Samson’s marriage. How twice happy are those parents who get a child born in the Lord, and then live to see their child married in the Lord! What a crown of blessing it is to a godly mother to get a second daughter in her son’s wife; and what a happy father he is who gets a second son in his daughter’s husband! But, then, all the more, what a gnawing sorrow it is when a son or a daughter marries away outside of all sympathy with their father’s house! Better, cries many a mother’s broken heart—better they had never been born than to be so mis-married. Samson’s father and mother never saw another happy day after that day when their son—miraculous birth, Nazarite vow and all—went down to Timnath and saw a woman, a daughter of the Philistines, and said, Get her for me to wife! Then his father and his mother said to Samson, Is there never a woman of the daughters of thy brethren, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? Was it for this day they had sanctified their unborn child? In his misery Manoah declared that he would never all his days pray for anything after this, lest it should turn to his bane, as his prayer for a son had so turned. For how is a child who brings such shame on his father and mother ever to fulfil the promise of his birth? How shall the son-in-law of an uncircumcised Philistine ever deliver Israel? Nor did all Samson’s riddles,

and jests, and sports, and revenges against the Philistines scatter or relieve the cloud that his first fatal step had brought down on his father's and his mother's heart.

Though we look with fear for it, and almost expect it, and though Josephus actually says it, yet we are not told it in the Bible, and we simply cannot believe Josephus, that Samson broke his Nazarite vow. Could we believe Josephus in what he writes, what a treasure-house for Bible readers he would be! But wherever Josephus stands without corroboration and confirmation, we simply cannot believe a word he says. We shall, therefore, set it down to Samson's credit that, with all his licence and with all his riot, he never became a drunkard. But, then, as it always comes into my heart when I read of Samson's total abstinence—

What boots it at one gate to make defence,
And at another to let in the foe?

You are making a gallant defence at one gate, but what about all the other gates; and, especially, what about the gates on the other side of the city? You keep, with all diligence, this and that gate of the body, but what about the more deadly gates of the soul? Plutarch tells us of a great Roman who was very brave; but, then, he was very envious of other brave men, and his envy did himself and them and the state more mischief than if he had been a coward. You work hard for God at your books and your visiting as a minister or as a Sabbath-school teacher, but you restrain prayer. You stand

up for use and wont in public worship, and in pulpit and in published doctrine ; but, then, you hate and hunt down the men who innovate upon you in these things. You go out, like Samson, against the enemies of God and His Church, but all the time you make your campaign an occasion for your own passions, piques, retaliations, and revenges. You do not touch wine, but how do you stand to all Samson's other sins? Death and hell will come still more surely into your hearts through the gates of envy, and ill-will, and hatred, and pride, and revenge, and malice, and unbelief, and neglect of God in prayer, than at those more yawning gates that all decently living men make a defence at. What avails this 'temperance not complete'?

Young men are not raised up among us nowadays with Samson's size and strength. The age of the Judges was a rude age, and God condescended to its rudeness, and raised up rude instruments to shape it. Samsons in body are not born among us in our day, but Samsons in mind are sometimes given us in room of them. And it is not seldom seen that our greatly gifted youths work as little deliverance for themselves and for us as Samson did for Israel. You hear of some young man's Samson-like feats of strength at the University or at the Divinity Hall. He rose from his shoulders upwards above all the men of his time. What was toil and defeat to them was but child's-play to him. Samson rent a lion that roared against him, as if it had been a kid. In the quickness and versatility of their minds our young Samsons set us riddles to which

we Philistines cannot supply an answer. They make sport of our slow wits. They tie firebrands to foxes' tails, and turn the foxes in among our standing corn. But we endure it all, looking on it all as but the rough sport of young giants, and we wait with hope for the day when they shall be found working painfully among those very cornfields and vineyards over which they are now making their too destructive sport.

But it often happens with our promised deliverers also that they fall far short of far weaker men in the after-work they do for themselves and for us. A common man, over whose birth no angel did wondrously, will often at the end of the day far outstrip his brilliant neighbour who started with all heaven and all earth looking on with applause and expectation. Genius is genius; but the oil-fed lamp of an honest mind and a humble heart will, not seldom, light its owner better home. Weak men must husband their strength. They have neither time nor strength to spare on those Samson-feats that end in a day's amazement, but work no deliverance in the land. And, moreover, the very diligence and assiduity that their few talents compel them to, keep them from those idle and ruinous dalliances with the Delilahs of the flesh and of the mind that more affluent men are more easily led into.

But, still, in spite of it all, Samson actually judged Israel for full twenty years. At the same time, for some reason or other, a reason we can only guess at, the sacred writer tells us not one

single word about what we would give a great deal to-night to know. Not one word are we told, neither about what kind of cases came up before Samson, nor how he managed his court, nor about the wisdom, or otherwise, of his judgments, nor about the manner of life that Israel lived for that whole generation under her gigantic judge. We sometimes hear it complained in our day that all the romance of the world is used up; that there is little or nothing left to the ambitious man of genius of these latter days but the most barren and most trampled spots of sacred and profane history. And, as a sad consequence to them and to us, that our dramatists and tragedians can never again give us such masterpieces as their forerunners have left behind them. Well, were I a sacred dramatist, I would ask for no better scope for my craft to-night than just the twenty years of Samson's judgeship. The whole magnificent drama of *Samson Agonistes* begins and ends, according to ancient rule and best example, within the space of twenty-four hours. Well, here are twenty untouched and absolutely silent years, during which the plot was laying deep and thickening fast toward the terrible catastrophe of Milton's masterpiece. Those twenty loaded years stand beckoning for a Milton or a Wells or a Browning to enter them, and to give us out of them a companion and a key to the *Agonistes*—a poem grave enough, moral enough, and profitable enough to satisfy the master of all these matters himself. Such an artist would let us see Samson repenting of having broken

his mother's heart, and repenting with the passion of a hundred penitents poured into one. He would let us see the Lord turning again to give Samson another chance. He would let us hear evil men in Israel mocking at Samson and his seat of judgment because of Timnath and Gaza. He would raise pity and anger wherewith to purge our hearts as we saw Samson striving to do only what was right, with men of Belial all about him waiting for his halting, and dwelling on all his past wrong-doing. And his chorus would purge our breasts with fear and with terror as they lifted the veil and let us see the passions of lust, and jealousy, and hatred, and revenge that were all the time tearing at the great heart of Manoah's miserable son. Till one of those passions, even after he had judged Israel twenty years, again broke out, and laid Samson low, never to rise again in this world.

Myself my sepulchre, a moving grave.

Prison within prison,

Inseparably dark !

Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me

But justly ; I myself have brought them on,

Sole author I, sole cause. If aught seem vile,

As vile hath been my folly.

But man's extremity is God's opportunity. And in such words as were possible to Samson's Old Testament biographer, that sacred writer tells us that in Samson also, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, and that God's strength was made perfect in the day of Samson's weakness. That dark cell in Gaza—in Gaza, the scene of some of Samson's greatest sins—that shameful cell

was a house of God, and a place of prayer and repentance to Manoah's overtaken and overwhelmed son. What a past Samson looked back upon as he sat at the mill! What he might have been! What he might have done! How he might have departed to his fathers and left Israel! Three thousand years dissolve, and *this* is Gaza. *This* is the mill with slaves. *This* man, and *that* man there, is Samson over again. Only, over again against light and truth that Samson never saw. 'What profit is there in my blood,' our Samson cries, 'when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? Shall it declare Thy truth? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me. Lord, be Thou my helper. Turn my mourning into dancing, my dreaming into earnestness, my falls into clearings of myself, my guilt into indignation, my sin into fear, my transgression into vehement desire, and my pollution into revenge. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me; He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold His righteousness. Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion on us; He will subdue our iniquities, and Thou shalt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.'

XXX

RUTH

THE SAME IS MY MOTHER

BOTH the Bible, and all the books that take after the Bible, are full of fine stories of love. The love of the mother for her child. The love of the lover for her he loves. The love of the brother for the sister. The love of Jonathan for David, and of David for Jonathan. The love of Paul for his people Israel. The love of Christ for His own and for all men, and so on. But neither in the Bible, nor anywhere else that I know of, is there another such story of love told as the love of Ruth for Naomi; the love of this Moabite daughter-in-law for her Hebrew mother-in-law. Ruth's love for her dead husband's decayed mother is as pure as gold and as strong as death. Many waters cannot quench Ruth's love. And her confession of her love, when she is constrained to confess it, is the most beautiful confession of love in all the world. The world has nothing after Ruth's confession of her love like it. And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house; the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the

dead, and with me. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me. No. There is nothing again like it 'The same is my mother.'

'She clave to her mother-in-law,' says the Scriptures. Ruth's heart was so full of the cords of love to Naomi that those strong cords drew her out of the land of Moab and knit her deep into the lineage of Israel, and into the ancestry of Jesus Christ. And thus it is that our great seer discovers Ruth seated on her glorious seat in the rose of the seventh heaven, beside the glorious seats of the greatest dames of Scripture story—Mary, and Eve, and Rachel, and Beatrice, and Rebecca. Before Ruth had given Naomi the full proof of her love, that desolate woman had bestowed her highest praise on Ruth's past love, not only as a wife, but still more as a daughter-in-law. The Lord deal kindly with thee, as thou hast dealt with the dead, and with me. And the women of Bethlehem at once caught up this quite singular feature of Ruth's affection when they came to congratulate Naomi on the birth of Obed. 'Thy daughter-in-law,' they said to Naomi, 'which loveth thee, and which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him.' And in this salutation of theirs the women of Bethlehem are in entire harmony with the whole world about

Ruth's so pure, and so noble, and so unparalleled love. Every language spoken among men has its own stock of cruel proverbs and satires and lampoons at the expense of their mothers-in-law. But Ruth and Naomi go far to redeem that relationship from all that obloquy. No only daughter of her own body could have been so devoted to Naomi as her son's young Moabite widow was. All the relationships of human life demand faith, and love, and patience, and forbearance, and good temper, and good sense, and good taste, and good feeling; but, perhaps, above all the other relationships of life that of a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law demands all those gifts and graces. But, then, the relationship that offers scope and operation and reward for all those gifts of heart and graces of character is just that relationship that should be entered on by all men and women with much watchfulness, solicitousness, prayer, tenderness, sympathy, and loyalty; in short, with the mind and the heart of Ruth, that Moabite maiden, and Naomi, that mother in Israel; that widow indeed.

Moses was as much opposed to Ruth's marriage as he had been to Jephthah's. A Moabite woman shall never be married by an Israelite man if I can help it, said that inexorable old law-giver; not to ten generations shall any of their offspring enter the congregation of the Lord. Yes, said Naomi, who had made up her mind to the interdicted marriage—Yes, she said to her more conservative and scrupulous husband, as she milked her kine under the top of Pisgah—Yes, she said, but marriage laws

are made for men and women, and not men and women for marriage laws. And had Moses been here, she went on; had Moses been famished out of Bethlehem-Judah, as we have been; and had he been received and entertained of Ruth's and Orpah's fathers and mothers, as we have been, he would to a certainty have torn that revengeful leaf out of his law. Depend upon it, she said, as she saw her husband beginning to give way, depend upon it, Moses had altogether other Moabites in his mind's eye than Ruth and Orpah, and their so hospitable fathers, when he set down his retaliatory marriage laws. And Elimelech at last gave way. Nehemiah also, as well as Moses, visited the iniquity of the Moabite fathers upon the Moabite children to too many generations. For that merciless reformer and iconoclast contended with, and smote with his fists, and forcibly divorced the men of Jerusalem who had married Moabite women in his day. But, there again, this is to be said for Nehemiah, that the law-breakers of his day had not married such dear, sweet, generous-hearted women as Ruth and Orpah were. 'Because their fathers met not the children of Israel with bread and with water,' said Nehemiah. But, then, that was just what Ruth and Orpah and their fathers had done. They had met Elimelech, and Naomi, and Mahlon, and Chilion, not with bread and water only, but with wine, and milk, and honey, and spices, and all manner of Moabite fruits, till the land of Moab became to that famished-out family of Bethlehem-Judah a land of Moab indeed, a most delectable mountain, a place to dwell in,

and to see their sons and their sons' sons settled in. And thus it came about that those two Israelite youths, Mahlon and Chilion, were married to those two Moabite maidens, Orpah and Ruth. And thus, through all that, it came about in God's providence that a rich stream of Moabite blood ran first in King David's veins, and then through David's veins into the veins of a far greater King than David.

After the death of Elimelech, Naomi was a widow after Paul's own heart. Naomi was a widow indeed. She was desolate, but she trusted God, and continued in supplication and prayer night and day. She was in behaviour likewise as becometh holiness. She taught the Moabite young women about her to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, and keepers at home. In short, she taught them to be wives and mothers in Moab like the wives and mothers in Israel. I feel sure we shall not be far wrong to trace up a great part of Ruth's courage, devotion, extraordinary loyalty, and exquisite love, not so much to Naomi's schooling as to her example. She, no doubt, had something to get over, as well as her husband, when the two marriages first began to dawn upon her. At the beginning she, too, had her own struggle with her Hebrew pride when she saw that her two Hebrew-born sons were not to be married into some of the oldest and best of the families of Bethlehem-Judah. But when she saw that was not to be, she bore no grudge against the two Moabite maidens, but went over to their side, and stood up for them against both Moses and

Elimelech. And then; now among the joys of marriages, and now among the sorrows of death-beds, Naomi showed to those two Moabite women what a widowed wife and mother had to rest on in Israel; and one, at least, of her daughters-in-law laid the lesson and the example well to heart. Yes; behind all the nobleness, steadfastness, beauty, and tenderness of Ruth, I see inspiring and sustaining and maturing it all, the wise, chastened, weaned *changed from* mind of one who was a mother in Israel and a *former habits* widow indeed. *and ending*

But you must not think of Naomi as a broken reed. You must not picture Naomi to yourself as a woman whose spirit was utterly and irrecoverably crushed. Widowhood with Naomi, and childlessness added to it, was not the dregs of life. It was not a few years of bitterness, and fretfulness, and listlessness, and ostentatious sorrow. No! Naomi is full of experience and full of resource. She knows the world. She knows the hearts of all the men and women about her. She knows the right way to act, and the right time to speak, widowhood, childlessness, and poverty, and all. With a rare and a delicate divination of how matters stood between Boaz and Ruth; knowing her kinsman and her kinswoman better than they knew themselves; Naomi struck the red-hot iron with the right stroke and at the right moment. Age and experience have their privileges and their opportunities, and Naomi possessed both age and experience, and employed them to purpose in the matter of Boaz and Ruth. 'Sit still, my daughter,' Naomi said to Ruth, while,

all the time, her own heart was in a hidden flutter of love and of hope.

Not obvious, not obtrusive, but retired,
The more desirable.

What a blessing it is to a young man at Boaz's state of mind, and to a young woman at Ruth's stage of things, to have a mother in Israel, or a widow indeed, to whom to open their hearts! Or, still better, to have such an one to love them so that their hearts are divined and read before they are opened. One would think at first sight that a girl's own mother, or a young man's own father, was the natural adviser and bosom friend of their children. And that a parent should be the first to be confessed to, consulted, trusted in, and followed. And, again, that they should be the first to see and to take to heart all that is going on in their child's heart. But, as a matter of fact and experience, wherever the blame or the inability may lie, it is never, it is not once in a thousand, that a young man takes his father, or a young woman her mother, into their confidence and into their whole heart. And still less seldom does a father or a mother make it natural and easy and sweet for their child to do so. All the better, therefore, when our young people find a second father or a second mother in some friend older, wiser, more tried, and more skilled in the providences of God and in the passions of man than they are as yet themselves. Some one just to say, Sit still, my daughter. Some one just to say, with an anecdote to illustrate it, My

times are in Thy hand. Some one just to say, I once knew a case exactly like yours. Or, better still, some one to tell them his own case, and to send them away with an *A Kempis* or an *Andrewes*, and this upon the fly-leaf, 'Your Father knoweth what things you have need of before you ask Him.' Then said Naomi to Ruth, 'Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall; for the man will not be at rest until he have finished the thing this day.'

The women are so delightful in this delightful little book that there is no room left for the men. The men fall into the background of the Book of Ruth, and are clean forgotten. But this must not be. One, at any rate, of the men of the Book of Ruth deserves a better fate. One of them was certainly written for our learning. And more especially for the learning of all landlords and farmers and employers of labour. 'Then Naomi arose with Ruth, for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread, and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. And she went, and came, and gleaned in his field after the reapers; and her hap was to light on a part of a field belonging to Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech. And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered

him, The Lord bless thee. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab.' Both Boaz's heart and his conscience were sorely struck within him at his servant's answer. For Naomi was a kinswoman of his own. He had known Naomi in better days. And he had heard of her widowhood, and of her return to Bethlehem; but he had not yet gone to see her, nor had he asked her to come to see him. He had made no inquiry of how she managed to live without husband or son. But here is a Gentile girl, a Moabite maiden, who has left her own proverbially abundant land to glean and to beg for the widow of his old friend Elimelech! And Boaz felt himself to be a beast on his own harvest field, while that gleaning Moabitess shone out like a princess in his eyes. 'Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust. So Ruth kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of the barley harvest and of wheat harvest, and Ruth dwelt with her mother-in-law.' Time would fail me to tell all the story of Boaz and Naomi and Ruth. Suffice it here to say that after two more chapters Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife, and she bore a son. And the women

her neighbours gave him a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi, and they called his name Obed ; he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

[Yes, Boaz is a splendid pattern to be set before all landowners, and farmers, and masters, and employers of labour. Courteous, solicitous, affectionate, devout, bountiful ; Boaz greets his reapers in the harvest field as if they had been his sons and daughters. He meets them in the morning with a benediction, as if he had been a priest, and they with a salutation answer him, The Lord bless our master. We hear him, indeed, in his jealousy for the reapers and the gleaners, issuing the strictest of orders to his young men ; but Boaz's own character and example are his young men's best law. Just, honourable, and upright in the market and in the gate, he is kind, generous, and hospitable at home. He eats and drinks with a merry heart in the happy harvest season ; but with it all he is at all times and in all places both temperate and chaste. A master to make his servants worship him. A mighty man of wealth, but forgetting and despising all that he possesses before beauty, and piety, and goodness, and truth.] Altogether a husband worthy of Naomi's dear daughter Ruth, and after that what more can be said ? From gleaning in his fields, and from falling at his feet, on till she sat at his table and lay in his bosom,—Ruth from first to last had nothing in her heart but pride, and respect, and love for Boaz. And he had neither act, nor word, nor look, nor wish to repent of, though Ruth had been found at his feet when his heart was merry.

A happy pair, with a romantic history behind them, and with a future before them that it had not entered into their sweetest dreams to dream.

With all that, it is not at all to be wondered at that the Church of Christ, with such a dash of romance and mysticism in her heart, should have seen in Ruth's husband, Boaz, a far-off figure of her own Husband, Jesus Christ. For she, like Naomi and Ruth, was disinherited, disconsolate, despised, forgotten, and without kinsman-redeemer in her famine and all her deep distress, when His eye and His heart fell on her in the field. And how well He has performed a kinsman's part all the world has read in a Book that for truth and beauty far outstrips the Book of Ruth. How He has not only redeemed her, but has given her rest in His own house, in His Father's house, and in His own heart—what written book can ever fully tell? Boaz the Bethlehemite and Ruth the Moabiteess made a noble marriage, and a noble race sprang out of that marriage. Obed, and Jesse, and David, and Solomon, and Joseph, and Mary, and Jesus Christ—my Kinsman-Redeemer, and yours.

XXXI

HANNAH

A MOTHER IN ISRAEL

BRAHAM and Sarah had no children. Isaac and Rebekah had no children. Jacob and Rachel had no children. Manoah had no children. Hannah had no children. The Shunamite had no children. Zacharias and Elizabeth had no children. Till it came to be nothing short of the mark of a special election, and a high calling, and a great coming service of God in Israel to have no children. Time after time, time after time, till it became nothing short of a special providence, those husbands and wives whose future children were predestinated to be patriarchs, and prophets, and judges, and forerunners of Jesus Christ in the house of Israel, began their married life with having no children. Now, why was that? Well, we may make guesses, and we may propose reasons for that perplexing dispensation, but they are only guesses and proposed reasons. We do not know. We cannot guess; for it is only those who are intimately and eminently godly, and who are at the same time childless, who can have any experience and assurance

of what God's motives are in that matter. And I do not know that any of that inner circle have anywhere come out and broken the divine silence. All the more—Why is it? Is it to spare and shield them from the preoccupation and the dispersion of affection, and from the coldness and the rudeness and the neglect of one another that so many of their neighbours suffer from? And is it to teach them a far finer tenderness, and a far rarer honour, and a far sweeter solicitude for one another? Or, on the other hand, is it out of pure jealousy on God's part? Is it that He may be able to say to them, Am I not better to thee than ten sons? Or, again, is it in order to make them meet, long before His other sons and daughters around them are made meet, for that life in which they shall neither marry nor be given in marriage? Which of all these reasons, or what other reason, has their God for what He does with so many of His best saints? But all this time we have been intruding into those things of which he says to us—What is that to thee?

Elkanah of Mount Ephraim, Hannah's husband, was, as we say, a true gentleman. He would have been a perfect and a spotless gentleman but for one hard spot in his heart; a hard and a dark spot in his heart that came out in a hard and a dark spot on his life. It was because of that hard spot in Elkanah's heart that Moses had consented to let Elkanah take two wives. But Elkanah's shameful licence which he had taken in that matter had by this time sufficiently revenged itself on Elkanah and on his whole house; for by the time we are

introduced to Elkanah and to his house, his transgression has been made so terribly his punishment, that his heart is as soft now, and as full of tears, as Hannah's heart itself is soft and a fountain of tears. And Elkanah's heart, far more than even Hannah's, was such a fountain. For to a man like Elkanah, to have done any one a great wrong, is, for all his after-days, to suffer far more than they can possibly suffer who only endure the wrong. I find a law, said Elkanah, as he went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh, that the greater the wrong done, and the greater the sorrow caused, the more all that comes back on him who did the wrong and caused the sorrow. But, Elkanah, sorrow upon sorrow at home, and yearly worship and sacrifice at Shiloh and all, never could undo the wrong he had done to Hannah and to all his house. He could only take every opportunity to sweeten a little, if possible, Hannah's great and bitter sorrow. But such was the cruel snare that Elkanah lay in, that every effort he made to lighten a little his own and Hannah's load, that effort only locked the teeth of the snare deeper than before into his soul. Elkanah could not move a finger to comfort Hannah's stricken heart without that instant provoking her adversary to fresh insults and fresh injuries. What Elkanah might have been driven to do had it not been for the worship and the sacrifices at Shiloh, we tremble to think of.

Of Peninnah, Elkanah's wife with children, we know nothing—nothing but what we hear from

her own cruel and scurrilous tongue. Those of you who are living in the same house with a woman like Peninnah, you could best picture to us poor Hannah's life. The servants who most slighted and insulted Hannah, were Peninnah's prime favourites; and her children were sharp to find out how to please their mother and get their own way. The sacred writer does not keep us long in Peninnah's company: he hastens past Peninnah to tell us about Hannah, that sorely-fretted and sequestered woman, who waters her couch with her tears. But, unless God was mocked on Mount Ephraim as He has never been mocked anywhere else, it does not need a prophet to tell us, if not Peninnah's past as a maiden and a young wife, then her future as an old mother and a widow. There were more sons and daughters of Belial being born and brought up in the house of Israel in these days, than Hophni and Phinehas. Take this child also, Belial had said to Peninnah over her successive child-beds, bring this one also up for me. And she did it. And you may take it for Holy Writ, though it is not written in as many words, that her children, when she was old, did not depart from the way in which she had brought them up.

I am filled with shame for myself and for my order as I see Eli sitting upon a seat by a post of the temple, and as I see Hannah's lips moving in prayer, and then hear Eli's rebuke of Hannah. 'Put away thy wine,' said Eli to Hannah. If he had said that to Hophni and Phinehas twenty years before, and had, at the same time, put away his

own, Eli would have had another grandson than Ichabod to bear and to transmit his name. 'How long wilt thou be drunken?' said Eli to Hannah. I do not wonder that Hophni and Phinehas became prodigals. What else could they become with such a father? When the blind lead the blind, what can you look for? That temple post, and that doited old priest sitting idle in the sun, and Hannah drunk with sorrow, and the way that Eli looks at her, and the things he says to her—Rock of Ages, let me hide myself in Thee! Only to Thy cross I cling—as I see Eli, and myself in Eli, and my children in Hophni and in Phinehas and in Ichabod. I see in Eli my idleness, my blindness to my own vices, and to my children's vices, my blindness also to my people's trials and temptations—one provoking and another being provoked, one drunk with pride and insolence, and another drunk with ill-usage and sorrow. I see in Eli my brutish ignorance while all that is going on round about me; as also my headlong and unjust judgments, and the way I preach at my people when I should be away out of sight and deep in God's holy place in prayer for them and for myself and for my children. O my God, when Thou sayest that Thou wilt do a thing at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle, I understand what Thou sayest and concerning whom Thou speakest. And I know, and I acknowledge, that had it not been for Thy long, long suffering, Thou wouldest have done all that to me and mine long before now. But, O my God, let Thy mercy endure for ever. Say to me that in Thy mercy I



am to have this year also in which to rise off my seat and to acquaint myself with my people's sorrows, and to go out and in among them spending and being spent. Let me have the grace to preach to them out of Hannah's song, as I have never yet done. To preach to them, and to tell them that there is none holy as the Lord: neither is there any Rock like our God: that the Lord God is a God of knowledge, and that by Him actions are weighed: that He raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the beggar from the dunghill, and that He will keep the feet of His saints. But, all the time—

Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

If Hannah was Elkanah's first wife, then there is nothing to be said but severe blame of Elkanah and deep sympathy with Hannah. But if Hannah was hoodwinked with her own wish to enter Elkanah's household as a second wife in those indecent days, then Hannah's bitter sorrow is just another harvest reaped according to the seed sown. How Hannah must often have envied, not the mothers of children so much, as those bright and merry maidens of Ephraim and Shiloh, whose souls were still their own. And how, as she went up to the temple and came home from it, she must have filled up the time with recalling the way the Lord had led her till she so let herself be misled by Elkanah. Had

Elkanah been a bad man, Hannah would not have been misled by him. In that case, Hannah would not have been in this snare. But when it was too late, Hannah learned that evil in a good man is just as deadly as the same evil in a bad man; as deadly, and far more dangerous. Hannah would never have crossed the threshold of any but a good man. You would never, all her days, have seen Hannah the wife of a son of Belial. But when Hannah crossed good Elkanah's threshold, she had still to learn that a sin against purity, a sin against human nature and the human heart, will bring down just as heavy a punishment on a patriarch's tent as on a profligate's. Punishments of that kind are no respecters of persons. And even when some might think your person respected, it may be to this extent, to the great and gracious extent of forgiveness; while, all the time, a sharp vengeance is taken on your inventions. Elkanah and Hannah invented a sin against married life on Mount Ephraim, and, while they were forgiven for it, all the time the vengeance that was taken on it, and on them on account of it broke every bone in their body and every hard spot in their heart.

'Her adversary provoked Hannah sore to make her fret.' Little did her adversary think—only, people like Hannah's adversary never think—little, I was going to say, did Peninnah think what a life of sin she had plunged Hannah into. And little do we think—only one here and there has the power and the will, the mind and the heart so to think—how we plunge this man and that woman into a

lifetime of deadly sin just by the way we provoke them to anger at us. Little do we think the sins that we are the true cause of, and of which we shall one day have to share the guilt. If you could see into this man's and that woman's heart, it would frighten you for once. We speak in a hyperbole about hell upon earth; but all the time there is one of the mouths of very hell in that heart that you have hurt till it so hates you. Exercise, I implore you, all your powers of imagination to put yourself in the place of that man or woman you so fret and provoke. Strive with all your might to put yourself inside his heart, so as to see and feel and sin and suffer as he does. Labour to see yourself as others see you. Be sure that Butler is right. Be sure that you differ from other people as much as they differ from you; and that you are as offensive to other people, and that they are as full of wicked passions at you as you are at them. And, then, this is terrible. This, that the most obscure of us, the most innocent of us, nay, the very best of us, and the most blameless—we all have many hearts burning like hell underground against us. There are men we have never seen, and men who have never seen us, who are yet provoked and fretted out of all their composure and all their grace and truth at the bare hearing or reading of our names. We never saw them or they us; and if we had the opportunity we would forgive them and do them a service; yet such are the blind and furious passions of their hearts that our very names are a madness to them. Surely the thought of that

should make us all walk softly and speak seldom and seek solitude and circumspection. Surely we should seek obscurity, and wish with all our heart that our so offensive name should never be spoken in this world again, or written or read. Nay, your very virtues are a provocation and a constant fury to men it would astonish you to be told about. Your very services, even to themselves; your very talents of which you are so innocent, and of which your Maker must bear the blame—what is there?—there is absolutely nothing in us, or about us, that does not provoke and exasperate somebody. Let God hide us all in the secret of His presence from the pride of men! Let Him keep us secretly in His pavilion from the strife of tongues!

Well, it was all that: it was Hannah's diabolical ill-usage at her adversary's hands, and it was still more, her own wicked and revengeful heart at her ill-usage: it was all that that made that saintly woman absolutely drunk sometimes with her sorrow. She staggered with her sorrow; she fell against the altar; she did not know what she was saying or where she was going; she actually forgot her own name, and did not answer when her name was spoken. Aaron himself would have been provoked to say to Hannah to put away her wine. Hannah was a saint; but she was a woman-saint; and hence her reeling heart. Hannah was able to command herself sometimes for weeks and months after she had been again at Shiloh. But something would happen in the household that would soon show that even Shiloh had made Hannah nothing better but rather

✓ worse; for her chastised and well-bridled tongue would all of a sudden break out again till, had it been in Greece or in Rome, she would have been called a fury rather than a woman and a saint. The milk of human kindness, not to say of womanhood, would suddenly turn to burning brimstone in Hannah's bosom. For days and weeks she would be able in the strength of the Shiloh meat to teach them their letters and to play with Peninnah's children better than if they had been Elkanah's and her own. She would toss them up in the air and make them light on their father's knee, till he clean forgot his sin and his shame and his pain. But the very next moment Hannah was within an inch of dashing them against the stones. Elkanah's happiness through any other wife but herself, and his rapture over her adversary's child's delightful ways, made Hannah sometimes go away to her bed like a she-tiger to her den. You will charge me with mocking you, and with an abuse of sacred words, when I call such a woman a saint. 'Among all the saints I have never found one,' said Santa Teresa, 'out of whose case I could take any comfort.' Well, speaking for myself, I can take comfort out of two saints. And one of them is Hannah of Mount Ephraim, and the other is Teresa of Mount Carmel. And out of another. 'Begone!' shouted the aged Philip, 'Begone! you do not know me. I am a devil if you knew me!'

'Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am? Some say that thou art Jeremias.' Our Lord makes no remark upon that. But I do not think that He

was greatly offended to be so taken. Had He said anything about the men of Cæsarea Philippi who took Him to be Jeremias, I am mistaken if He would not have said that they were not far from the kingdom of heaven. For they had been drawn to Him just as we have been drawn to Hannah. They had seen Him in the Temple with His lips moving. No, they held, He is neither Moses nor Elias: He is the Man whose sorrow was like no other sorrow that has ever been seen. Pascal is continually preaching to us that the more spiritual light we have, the more spiritual sorrow we have. No wonder, then, that the Spiritual Light Himself was the Man of supreme spiritual sorrow. Who would not have been sad who had eyes to see what went on in Elkanah's house at Shiloh? No man but a blind and a hopeless fool would have been other than sad over houses like the house of Elkanah and Peninnah, and Eli and Hophni and Phinehas. And the land was full of such houses in the days of our Lord, and thus it was that He was what the observing men of Cæsarea Philippi saw that He was. There are multitudes of men and women amongst us who are drunk and dazed with many kinds of sorrow. But it is only now and then that you will come—now in life and now in literature—on a man who is drunk and dazed with sorrow for sin. 'Pascal was greedy of happiness,' says Sainte-Beuve in a fine essay, 'but of a noble and an infinite happiness. He had that profound inquietude which attests a moral nature of a high order, and a mental nature stamped with the seal of the archangel! Pascal is

of this leading and glorious race : he has more than one sign of it in his heart and on his brow : he is one of the noblest of mortal men, but he is sick, and he would be cured. Pascal sweats blood. Pascal clings to the Cross as to a mast in shipwreck.' His sister tells us that the noblest and most self-denying of brothers was sometimes so stupefied by reason of his own sinful nature that his very family affections were withered up in the terrific fires that burned his heart to ashes. And an intellectual and a moral nature like Pascal's ; a spiritual sensibility like Pascal's ; will always bring along with it Pascal's exquisite and awful sorrow. But let not your hearts be troubled, for it is a noble sorrow. It is a supernatural sorrow. It is the sorrow of the great saints ; it is the sorrow of the Son of God. And as He was so are we in this world. Our present sorrow for sin is the exact measure and the sure seal of our future joy.

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XXXII

ELI

*HIS SONS MADE THEMSELVES
VILE, AND HE RESTRAINED
THEM NOT*

‘EEST thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him.’ Yes; but we have hope of Eli in spite of his hasty words. For Eli never forgave himself for his hasty words to Hannah. Eli had many bitter memories as he sat by the wayside watching for the ark of God. And one of the bitterest of those memories was the lasting memory of his insulting language to Hannah. No sooner was that hasty word gone out of Eli’s mouth than he would have given all the world to have had that hasty word back again. ‘Go in peace,’ Eli said, ‘and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition which thou hast asked of Him.’ And all his days, in his sore remorse for what he had said to Samuel’s mother before Samuel was born, Eli tried to make up for that insult to Samuel her son. Eli’s extraordinary care over young Samuel; his extraordinary tenderness toward the child; and, as Samuel grew up, the old priest’s secret fear at Samuel; and his growing reverence for him,—all that was all that Eli could

do to undo the insult and the injury he had done to Samuel's mother.

Samuel was predestinated soon to succeed to all Eli's forfeited offices. All Eli's high positions were soon to descend to Samuel. And Eli saw all that preparing to come about, and preparing to come about soon. But all that did not alter or abate by one iota Eli's notable goodness to Samuel. Eli could not have treated Hophni or Phinehas better than he treated Samuel, his immediate successor. Frederick Robertson, in his able apology for Eli, makes a great deal of the total absence of envy in Eli. But surely not with that great preacher's wonted insight. My tongue may be cleaving to the roof of my mouth with envy ; I may be as blind with envy as Eli was blind with old age ; the hair may have fallen off my head till I am bald with envy—and yet no man about me may so much as guess it. What Eli is to be praised for is this—not that he felt no envy of Samuel ; but that, feeling envy every day, as he could not fail to feel it, he kept his envy down, and did not let it come out in his treatment of Samuel. Of course Eli had envy of Samuel ; all men have envy in their hearts who are placed by God in Eli's circumstances, and it is misleading and mischievous in the last degree in any preacher to say anything else. God alone could say whether Eli had envy or not. And he never says that about Eli or any other man. He says about Eli and all men the very opposite. The point with God is not whether I have envy or not ; but it is this, how I deal with the envy that He knows I have. All that my fellow-men can see in me is not the envy of my

heart, but that of my life. They can see and hear whether or no I backbite, and belittle, and detract, and depreciate; as also whether I consent and take part and pleasure with them who do. And while that is much to see and to judge, it is far from being all. If the Baptist had no envy and no jealousy of his fast-rising Cousin, then he has all that the less praise for his noble reply to his envious and jealous disciples. But if the Forerunner had to fast from his locusts to help him to subdue his pride; if it was only after many unwitnessed days and nights of sweat and prayer and blood that he was enabled to hand over John and Andrew to Jesus whom he had baptized but yesterday beyond Jordan; then John the Baptist is of some use to you and to me. But if John had no such envy and no such jealousy himself as his disciples had on his account, then he was not a man of like passions as we are. If John did not sometimes find himself hating Jesus in his heart till, in his agony, he threw himself over the bleeding rocks of the wilderness, then all I can say is, that Elizabeth's sanctified son was not made of the same rotten stuff with you and me.

Not only had Eli, with all his envy, a very real and a very deep love for little Samuel; but along with that, and kept alive by that, he had a real, a living, and a deep faith in God, and in God's voices and visions and answers to men. Eli's fine benediction spoken over Hannah the next moment after he had mistaken her for a daughter of Belial; his open-hearted adoption of little Samuel to be his assistant and successor in the temple service; his rich and

recompensing benediction pronounced on Samuel's mother because she had lent little Samuel to the Lord; his midnight lesson to his little elect companion; his solemn demand next morning to be told what the Lord had said to the prophetic child during the night; and his instant acceptance of the terrible message that little Samuel was compelled to deliver,—all that shows us that Eli, with all his shipwreck of life and opportunity and privilege, had the root of the matter all the time in him. There had been no 'open vision' for many a day in Israel. But Eli's mind had been open all the time. You will see men with great faults, and even with completely lost and wasted lives, who yet all through, and to the end, have a certain openness of mind to divine truth, and a certain sure and spontaneous sympathy with divine truth to whomsoever it comes, and through whomsoever it speaks. And poor old Eli was one of those open-minded and truth-loving men. If his own sins and his sons' sins had shut silent the divine vision, then Eli was all the more prepared to believe that the divine vision would hereafter speak to better men than he had been. And when the divine vision did begin to break its long silence, and to speak again,—for Eli to accept that vision, even when it came in the shape of a sentence of capital punishment on himself and on his house,—well, if ever faith had her perfect work in an open mind, it was surely in cast-away Eli's open mind. What a lesson is here, and what a noble example to all old castaways among ourselves! The Spirit and the providences of God

in His Church have stood still in our day. There has been nothing to call an open vision. We have sinned away the open vision. We have quenched the speaking Spirit. But, all the time, the Spirit of God is only waiting till we are out of His way, and then He will return and will not tarry. As soon as we are dead and gone, and obstruct the Spirit of God no more, Samuel will come, and the Lord will be with Samuel, and will let none of his words fall to the ground. But God's mercies always come mingled up with God's judgments, and if you have Eli's loving heart for the rising generation of God's ministers; and if with that you have a still living, if hitherto a too-barren faith in the ever-living God; in alleviation of your punishment, and in reward of your faith and your love, He will send the beginning of the returning vision before the end of your lost life. And even if that vision comes to condemn your whole life, and to pass sentence on you, and on your evil house; yet, even so, better that than to live and die in the long absence and the total silence of an angry God. Let us expect, then, for our successors what we have sinned away from ourselves. Let us believe and be sure that the coming generation will see visions and hear voices that we have not been counted worthy to see or to hear, because of our great unfaithfulness and unfruitfulness, and because of our great blindness and disobedience.

And then, look at old Eli's splendid resignation and Gethsemane-like submission. 'It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good.' I shall never

believe that Eli is lost. Broken neck; dead sons and daughters lying strewed all around him; the ark taken; the temple in ruins, and the glory departed, and all—Eli is not lost. No man is wholly lost who lies lost before God like that. ‘Though He slay me,’ said Job. But He did not slay Job as He slew Eli. Job’s patience, and meekness, and submission, and resignation were terribly enough tried; but they were not tried down to death as Eli was. And He who so rewarded Job, and who so supported and rewarded His own Son—no, I shall not believe it till I see it that Eli is among the reprobate. ‘It is the Lord.’ If anything will cover a multitude of sins; if anything will draw down the mercy of God, surely that cry of Eli’s will do it.

Away back, at the beginning of his life, Eli had taken far too much in hand. Eli was not a great man like Moses or Aaron, but he took both the office of Moses and the office of Aaron upon his single self. Eli was both the chief judge and the high priest in himself for the whole house of Israel. The ablest, the most laborious, the most devoted, the most tireless and sleepless of men could not have done what Eli undertook to do. They called Origen ‘Brazen-bowels,’ he was such a sleepless student. But Eli would have needed both bowels of brass, and a head and a heart of gold, to have done the half of what he undertook to do.

And, taking up what was beyond mortal power to perform, the certain result was that he did nothing well, but did everything ill. Both his

high priesthood at the altar, and his chief judgeship at the gate, and his sole fatherhood in his own house; both God's house and his own house, and the whole house of Israel, went to wreck and ruin under overladen Eli. It is startling and terrible to think that the unparalleled catastrophe of Eli's awful end had its first and far-back roots in what is as much a virtue, surely, as a vice: his determination to do two men's work with his own hands. But, whatever Eli's motives were for loading himself with all this plurality of offices and emoluments, the terrible catastrophe of his own end and his sons' end and the end of Shiloh—all this had its earliest roots in Eli's vaulting ambition and consequent incapacity and neglect. The mischief was widespread. But it was at home that the widespread mischief rose to a height that went beyond human remedy and beyond divine forgiveness. And may something of that same kind not be the explanation of some of those sad cases where the houses of able and good and devoted ministers come to such ruin? What with the pulpit of our land and our day—more than enough of itself; and what with the resulting and accompanying pastorate—more than enough of itself also for one man working at it in season and out of season; with so many public demands and claims, and with such incessant calls and encroachments at all hours of the day and night, there is neither time nor strength to do any part of a minister's work as it ought to be done. And one worried week follows another worried week till his children grow up and grow out of his

knowledge. 'A bishop must be vigilant.' Yes; but a bishop in our day would need to have a hundred eyes and a hundred hands and a hundred feet. 'He must rule well the house of God.' Yes; but the apostle tells Timothy that he must know how to rule his own house first. It is a fine picture: 'One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.' It would almost seem that Paul had had the ruins of Eli's house before his mind when he wrote that fine instruction. All other men have the grave sweet Sabbath-day to spend with their children, ruling and teaching them: all but ministers, and policemen, and some other slaves. But ministers have neither Saturday, nor Sabbath, nor Monday. And I never hear them complaining of that, unless it is when they think of their children. We call Eli old, and blind, and idle, and inefficient, and ignorant, and neglectful of his own children and of God's people; and so he was. But all that was not because he did nothing, but because he did too much to do anything well. Till, at last, broken in life and broken in heart, with his nation and his church and his household lying all in ruins round about him, we see Eli sitting by the wayside waiting for death. A terrible end to such a bold and ambitious beginning.

'Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.' Impossible! you would protest, if it were not in the Bible. But just because it is in the Bible, we are compelled to ask ourselves how it could possibly come about that the sons of

such a sacred man as Eli was could ever become sons of Belial. What! not know the Lord, and they born and brought up within the very precincts of the Lord's house! Were not the first sounds they heard the praises of God in His sanctuary? Were not the first sights they saw their father in his robes beside the altar with all the tables, and the bread, and the sacrifices, and the incense round about him? And yet, there it is in black and white; there it is in blood and tears—'The sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.' Let me think. Let me consider well how, conceivably, it could come about that Hophni and Phinehas could be born and brought up at Shiloh and not know the Lord? Well, for one thing, their father was never at home. What with judging all Israel, and what with sacrificing and interceding for all Israel, Eli never saw his children till they were in their beds. 'What mean ye by this ordinance?' all the other children in Israel asked at their fathers as they came up to the temple. And all the way up and all the way down again those fathers took their inquiring children by the hand and told them all about Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Moses, and Aaron, and the exodus, and the wilderness, and the conquest, and the yearly passover. Hophni and Phinehas were the only children in all Israel who saw the temple every day and paid no attention to it. And, then, every father and mother knows this, how the years run away, and how their children grow up, till all of a sudden they are as tall as

themselves. And very much faster than our tallest children did Eli's children grow up. All things, indeed, were banded against Eli; the very early ripeness of his sons was against Eli. He thought he would one day have time; but it was his lifelong regret that he had never had time. And, what with one thing, and what with another; what with their father's preoccupation and their own evil hearts; the two young men were already sons of Belial when they should still have been little children. 'Why do ye do such things? For I hear of all your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons, this is no good report that I hear.' Like our own proverb, Eli is seen shutting the stable-door with many tears and sobs years and years after the steeds have been stolen. I have spoken of Job. Well, I always think that Job was the very best father in all the Old Testament, while Eli was surely the very worst. Job—let this passage be repeated to himself by every father every day from the first day he is a father, this golden passage—'Job was one that pleased God and eschewed evil. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.' Our old ministers when they had a father at the pulpit-foot were used to make him swear that he would pray 'both with and for' his children. Now, it was just here that Eli went wrong. And it is just

here that so many of ourselves go wrong, and our children. We scold and scowl at them, and we beat and bruise and lock them up, when we should pray both with them and for them. If, when they tell a lie, or steal, or speak bad language, or strike one another, or defiantly disobey us, we would neither lift a hand nor a tongue at them, but would take them to our place of prayer, and there pray both with and for them,—as sure as I stand here and you sit there,—there would be fewer sons and daughters of Belial in our houses. Let us do it. Let us, after Eli to-night, go home and do it. And if our children are grown up and gone away, let us all the more go after them, like Job, with that Sacrifice and that importunity which have the promise and the power to apprehend them and to bring them back. Thus did Job continually. You will all have it well in your mind how this all ended. How the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. And how Eli, when he heard the evil tidings, fell from off his seat backward, and his neck brake, and he died. And how his daughter-in-law, her pains came upon her, but she answered not, neither regarded it; and how she named her son Ichabod, and so died.

‘The Psalm of Ichabod, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, which he sang after that the Lord had repented Him of the evil, and had restored the priesthood to the house of Eli: I will confess my iniquity and the iniquity of my fathers. The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. But pardon the iniquity of Thy ser-

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vant, according to Thy great mercy, and as Thou hast been a father to the fatherless, so hast Thou been to Thy servant. I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintances. I was like a broken vessel. But I trusted in Thee, and Thou didst deliver me. I was cast upon thee from my mother's knees, and Thou didst hide me in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of men. Thou didst show me Thy loving-kindness in a fenced city. I am a wonder to many, but my boast is in God. Thou hast restored to me what the locust had eaten. Thou hast anointed my head with oil and made my cup to run over. Thou hast taken off my sackcloth and hast girded me with gladness. Come, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold on me; but Thou hast brought up my life from the pit that I might show forth Thy praise. O Lord, I am Thy servant: I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid. I will pay Thee my vows which my mouth spake when I was in trouble. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.' Thus sang Ichabod, the son of Phinehas, after that the Lord had repented Him of the evil.

XXXIII

SAMUEL

*BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART:
FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD*



IR JOSHUA REYNOLDS has made all our children familiar with little Samuel. In the beautiful picture that sanctifies the walls of all our nurseries our children see and hear little Samuel kneeling and saying, Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. And many a mother has taken the opportunity from that sweet picture to teach her child the same lesson that Eli taught the child Samuel. ‘Sometimes when you are alone, my child, and both while you are yet a child, and after you are a big man, the same God of little children and of big men who spoke to little Samuel will come and speak to you. He will call you by name. If your name is Samuel, He will call and say, Samuel, Samuel, or whatever else your name is. And, be sure, my child, to answer at once. Be sure you say that moment, Speak, Lord, for Thy little servant heareth. And God will speak to you just as sure as He spoke to Samuel. Be sure He will. For He is about your path, and about your bed. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Him; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the

light are both alike to God.' Good Sir Joshua has helped multitudes of good mothers to teach their children to pray.

Hannah lent little Samuel to the Lord according to her promise. That is to say, she lent Samuel to Eli the Lord's servant, and to the temple at Shiloh, which was the Lord's house. As soon as he was able to put on his own clothes and run about, his mother kept her promise. Hannah took Samuel up to Shiloh, and the child was young. And she said to Eli: O my lord, as thy soul liveth, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord: as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, and he was girded with a linen ephod. Little Samuel was the little doorkeeper of God's house in Shiloh. He ran messages also for Eli. He opened the doors of the tabernacle in the morning, and he shut them at night. He lighted the seven-branched candlestick at sunset, and he put it out at sunrise, and did everything his quick little hands and quick little feet could do to keep the house of God in order and beauty, serving the Lord. Once every year his mother came up to Shiloh to see her son, and to bring him a little coat that she made a little bigger and a little bigger every year till he grew to be a man. And after his mother was taken home to heaven and came no more to Shiloh, when Samuel the prophet needed another coat he had it always made of the same substance and of the same shape that his

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Samuel's
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mother wove for him on her loom in Ephraim. It was her favourite substance and her favourite pattern, and the old prophet would never wear anything else. All his days the people knew Samuel by his 'mantle,' which was just his little coat made larger for a man. And he wears it to this day as he serves God beside his mother in heaven. When he came back from heaven to rebuke Saul for his sins, and to announce to that bad king his fast-approaching end, Samuel had still the very same mantle on. Only it was made now of finer linen, and it was cleaner and whiter than any weaver or fuller in Israel could weave it or whiten it. All the same, it was the very same mantle—the very same little coat his mother had made him when he was her little son, only of a substance now and a beauty fit for the heavenly Shiloh.

If Samuel's mother was still in this world when the ark was taken, and when Shiloh was laid waste, then the likelihood is that he went back to live with his mother till he should see what the Lord had for him to do. Wherever Samuel lived I am sure he lived a good life, and was never idle. Only, for the next twenty years, or thereabouts, Samuel is quite lost to us in that wild and lawless world. From about his twelfth to his thirtieth year, like Another, Samuel was ripening in secret for his future work as a great prophet. Ripening; because he had already been planted in the house of God in his early youth. In after-years Samuel's best-known name in Israel was 'The Seer.' 'Tell me,' said Saul on one occasion to a stranger he met, 'where the Seer's

Samuel's
Coat

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mother-

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year

house is.' 'I am the Seer,' said Samuel; 'come with me, and to-morrow I will tell thee all that is in thine heart.' And if you will weigh that name of Samuel well, and will carry that name deep enough into the things of God and man, you could not have anything told about Samuel that would better help you to understand him. 'I am the Seer, and I will tell thee all that is in thine heart.' And, not only in Saul's heart, but in God's heart also. For God opened His mind and heart to Samuel, and when the people discovered that, all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. 'The Seer,' they said. 'Samuel, the Seer. The man amongst us who sees God, and who tells us what is in our hearts.'

When he was yet a child, Samuel was made a seer before he knew. He saw enough of God and man that terrible night to make him an old man and a seer before the morning. As he lay awake till the morning he saw what was the wages of all that wickedness that had so horrified him to see and to hear in Eli's sons. He saw, while yet a child, that the wages of such sin is death. And he saw what would be the end of all that to Eli also, his father in the Lord. Till it was no wonder that he hesitated to tell to Eli all that he had seen and heard that terrible night. And all that must have worked powerfully together to make young Samuel the pure, prayerful, holy child before God and man that he early was and continued to be. His purity of heart and his love for holy things prepared Samuel

his sons

early to be a seer ; and the sights he saw both in heaven and in earth ; both in God and in man, only perfected all his days what had been so early and so well begun.

And all happy children who have mothers like Hannah, and who all their days keep themselves pure in heart and pray like Samuel, they see God clearer and clearer all their days. They are still the seers in Israel. Every Scripture testifies to that, and every great saint and servant of God is a fresh proof of that. The impure in heart never see God. Hophni and Phinehas never saw God. The darkness shall cover us, they said, and it did. It did, till a Hand out of the darkness struck them down in their sin. They had no mother, and therefore they never saw God till they came to their awful end. Had Hannah been their mother ; had Hannah adopted the two sacred orphans ; and had she adopted them in time : then they, as well as Samuel, would have seen God ; and all the awful overthrow of Eli's house, and God's house, and the whole house of Israel would have been averted and escaped. Such blessedness is there in a good mother ; in an early plantation in the house of God ; and in a pure heart ; for, then, with Hophni and Phinehas for Israel's high priests, and with Samuel for her prophet from Dan to Beersheba,—‘ I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat ; and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.’ Mothers in Israel, would you have your sons to be seers and life-long servants of

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Mothers

God? Now is your opportunity. Teach them early, as Eli taught Samuel. Teach them under the picture of Samuel hanging over their bed. And never lie down in your own bed without prayer for them till you are sure that they see God. And then you can take your well-earned rest. ‘Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.’ And, would any young man here see God? Would he see God in his own heart and mind and imagination, where God is best seen? Then let him keep God’s temple clean. And then he will not only see God in his own mind and heart and imagination, but in Holy Scripture also, in Jesus Christ, in creation, in providence, in the means of grace, and eventually where Samuel now sees Him. The promise is plain, and the thing is true. ‘Blessed are the pure in heart.’ And again, ‘If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.’ And again, ‘And holiness, without which no man shall see God.’ The true doctrine of seeing God is written in Scripture with a thousand sunbeams, and every man’s own life is to him the seal of it. Every pure man’s life is to him the seal of it. And every impure man’s life is no less to him the seal of the other side of it. Hophni and Phinehas’s lives were the seals of it to them. And Samuel’s life was the seal of it to him. And your life is the seal of it to you. And my life is the seal of it to me.

Blest are the pure in heart,
For they shall see their God :
The secret of the Lord is theirs ;
Their soul is Christ’s abode.

Without being prophets we could predict what kind of a judge Samuel would make when he sat down on the seat of justice. Seeing God; remembering what Abraham said to God on one occasion about the Judge of all the earth; able to tell men all that was in their hearts; Israel never had a judge like Hannah's son. Josephus says that Samuel had an 'inborn love of justice.' And so he had. Some men still, both in public and in private life, have that same love of justice born in them. And they are happy men, and all men are happy who have to do with them. Some other men, again, most men indeed, have an inborn love of injustice that they have to fight against all their days. The golden rule is written, as if with nature's own finger, on some men's hearts; while other men are never able all their days to learn that rule. Samuel was still 'The Seer' as he sat on the judgment-seat; but there was nothing enthusiastic, carried-away, or impracticable about Samuel. He was a clear-eyed, firm-handed, sure-footed, resolute-minded, righteous man, with an inborn sense of truth and righteousness: and all his opinions, and decisions, and sentences carried all men's consent and conscience with them. In ancient Rome they used to put on a white robe when they went out to ask for the votes of the voters, and it was for this that they were called 'candidates' in the language of Rome: spotless men, that is, in our language. But it was only one famous name here and another famous name there that came out of office as clean as they entered it. Look at Samuel laying down his office, and putting on his snow-white mantle.

The Judge

‘Behold, now, I am old and grey-headed: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am. Witness against me before the Lord. Whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? And I will restore it to you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man’s hand. And he said to them, The Lord is witness. And they answered, He is witness.’

Missell
Samuel was removed from his mother’s side while still a child. No sooner was he at home in Shiloh than Shiloh fell, and he had again to change his home. In his office of judge he was continually on circuit dispensing justice and judgment up and down the land. And then when Saul became king, Samuel was compelled to retire into obscurity, and become of no reputation. Samuel was emptied from vessel to vessel till there was no lees left in the wine. The noblest thing, in some respects, in all Samuel’s noble life was the way he took the providence of God in the establishment of the monarchy. The monarchy was a great innovation. It was a great revolution. And even more than that, it was a severe condemnation, if not of Samuel’s own life, yet of his office and his order, which are sometimes dearer to a man than life itself. And, in addition to that, it was the deposition and dismissal of his two sons from the office and the rank to which he had raised them. Everything was against Samuel

taking kindly to the thought of the new monarchy. All Samuel's past life had been spent in animating and purifying, and restoring the republic; but when he saw that a kingdom was coming in, instead of meeting it with resistance and obstinacy and lifelong hostility, the great man bowed to the will of God and the will of Israel, and cast in his lot with the new dispensation. Samuel had a great struggle with himself to do it; and he did not hide that struggle from Israel. But, that struggle over, Saul had no such loyal and faithful friend as Samuel the deposed judge. The State and Church of Israel shall have Samuel's service to the end. What there is out of the great past that is worth preserving he will do his best to preserve. What of the old order can safely be carried over into the new order he will do his best to carry that over. As far as Samuel is concerned Saul and his kingdom shall not only have fair play; but they shall have all Samuel's influence with God and with man. It is only a great man and a noble who can act in that way. And the more individuality of character, and the more independence of mind, and the more strength of will such men have, the nobler is the thing they do. It takes the very finest natures to pass over from one generation to another, and to work in the new generation as they worked in the old. It was splendidly done by Samuel. And it has been splendidly done, now and again, since Samuel's day. And, best of all, it has been splendidly done in our own day. And it is one of the finest sights to be seen among men when men

Willing to
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have eyes and hearts to see it. It is only the old, and the ripe, and the much-experienced, and the men fullest of past service, who can do Samuel's service to our generation and the generation which is coming up after us. No amount of talent; no amount of loyalty; no amount of humility, even, can make up in the young—in young statesmen and in young churchmen—for the wisdom, and the experience, and the standing, and the influence of the aged. If the past time is to hand over its proper heritage to the present time, it is the old who can best do it. And I do not know that history, either sacred or profane, holds out a better example of this large-hearted, public-spirited wisdom than Samuel the deposed judge, and now the chief counsellor of Saul.

But Samuel, deposed and superseded as he was, was full of new and still more fruitful ideas and intentions for Israel. And what did Samuel do to occupy his talents in his ripe age, and still to serve God and God's people? Never mortal man did a better, or a more fruitful thing than Samuel now did. Samuel planned and set up an institution, so to call it, that has made far more mark on the world than anything else that survives to us out of Israel or Greece or Rome. In his ripe and far-seeing years Samuel devised and founded and presided over a great prophetic school in his old age. That school of the prophets to which we owe so much of Samuel himself; to which we owe David, and Gad, and Nathan, and all their still greater successors; that great school was the creation and

School
of Prophets

the care of Samuel's leisure from office. How much of the Old Testament itself we owe to the prophets, and the preachers, and the psalmists, and the sacred writers, and other trained students of Samuel's great school, we have not yet fully found out. The day may come when all the Old Testament, as we now have it, will be traced back to that great institution that God honoured Samuel to plan and to set up as his reward for his pure heart, and his holy, studious, self-sacrificing life. And it is admitted—it is no fancy to say it—that our modern universities, divinity halls, and great public schools, have all their far-down roots in Mount Ephraim, and in Samuel's great college which he founded there. True, divine prophecy does not come by the will of man in prophetic schools, or anywhere else. School or no school, holy men of God will always speak as they are moved by the Holy Ghost. No man knew that better than Samuel; but at the same time, no man ever struck out a more fruitful line of action in the things of God than when Samuel laid the foundation of the sacred school of Ramah. Israel had already a divine deposit of religion and worship and morality and civilisation, all of which they had but to accept and assimilate in order to be the strongest, the safest, and the happiest nation on the face of the earth. But the divine law was too high and too good for Israel. Their hearts were hard, and they were not upright in God's covenant. And the new monarchy was already threatening to become a very stronghold of that hard, worldly, rebellious spirit. Saul, in

spite of all that Samuel could do, was soon to become a complete shipwreck. But the throne was destined to stand long after Saul was cast out of it; and Samuel is determined to do his very best to secure it that Saul's successors shall have around them and over their people a class of men who, if not indeed prophets,—Samuel cannot secure that—the wind bloweth where it listeth,—yet Samuel can and will secure that there shall be an estate of learned and earnest-minded men, who shall watch over the religion and the morals of the people, in the prophetic spirit and in the prophetic name. And thus it came about that at Naioth in Ramah the first school of the prophets was set up. Ramah was Elkanah's old property; it had now come into Samuel's hands; and at Naioth, the quietest and sweetest spot of all his patrimonial estate, Samuel set up the first divinity hall; the first school for prophets and psalmists in Israel.

But, crowning all and sanctifying all was Samuel's life of prayer. Samuel was a proverb of prayer. The tradition of Hannah's psalm and prayer was well known to every young prophet in Samuel's school, and her best memories were perpetuated and transmitted in the devotional life and labours of her son. 'Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call on His name,' *where* As much as to say that Samuel stands at the head of all the men of prayer in Israel, just as Moses and Aaron stand at the head of all the prophets and priests in Israel. The successors of Moses and Aaron were a glorious enough succession; but all

that fades and vanishes away before the far greater glory of pure and unceasing prayer, and especially of unceasing intercessory and undeserved prayer. 'As for me,' said Samuel, 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.' Samuel said that as his answer to his sentence of deposition and banishment from being their head and their king in all but the name. Samuel, then, among them that pray for their enemies and for them that despitefully use them. Samuel among them that are cast off and forgotten after a lifetime of self-forgetful service. Samuel among them that cease not to pray for the prosperity of those who have taken their place in the world and in the Church, and in the hearts and the mouths of men. Samuel among them who have such a pure heart that nothing will ever turn their heart to gloom, or bitterness, or discontent, or retaliation, or to anything else, but to still more prayer.

Such, then, was some of the interest that the Lord paid to Hannah for the early loan of Samuel her son. And the Lord is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

Man
of
Prayer

XXXIV

SAUL

*AND SAMUEL SAID, I AM THE SEER,
AND TO-MORROW I WILL TELL THEE
ALL THAT IS IN THINE HEART*



R. NEWMAN, after attempting three times to preach on Saul, is compelled to confess that Saul's character continues to be obscure to him, and he warns us that we must be exceedingly cautious while considering Saul's so obscure character. Now, if Saul's character was still so obscure to the subtlest and the acutest of all our preachers, I cannot expect to be able to say much to purpose upon it. At the same time, with so much told us about Saul; and told us in such a plain, open, and straightforward style; and told us, as it must have been, for our instruction, we may surely hope to be able, amid all his acknowledged obscurity, to gather sufficient instruction out of Saul to justify us in taking him up for our subject this evening.

But, unhappily, the obscurity begins further back than Saul. The obscurity begins with Saul's father and mother. We never hear of Saul's mother; but what kind of a father can Kish have been? We know all about Samuel. There is no obscurity about Samuel. All Israel, from Dan even to Beer-

sheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord ; all Israel but Kish and his son Saul. Hannah, and Samuel, and Eli, and Hophni and Phinehas, and Ichabod were all household words, as we say, in every household in Israel. Only, there was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, and he had a son whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly, but neither father nor son, neither Kish nor Saul, had ever heard of Samuel. Kish the father, and Saul the son, were so busy breeding asses that they made light of Samuel, and would not come. Samuel was an old man by this time. Samuel had grown grey in a service that made all Israel acknowledge and know God from the one end of the land to the other ; but Saul, all the time, did not know Samuel when he saw him. ‘Tell me, I pray thee,’ said Saul to a stranger he met on his way when he was in despair about his father’s lost asses, ‘where is the Seer’s house.’ ‘I am the Seer myself,’ said Samuel. ‘Come with me, and I will tell thee all that is in thine heart.’ Yes, there is some quite inexplicable obscurity about Kish as well as about Saul ; an obscurity that perplexes us, and throws us out at the very opening of his son’s sad history. And yet, when we turn back and begin to read Saul’s whole history over again with our eye on the object ; when we stop and look round about us as we read, the ancient obscurity begins to pass off, but only to let alarm and apprehension for ourselves and for our own sons take its place. The prophet Samuel had been a public man, as we say, long before Saul was born. And, but for Saul, we would have said that

there could not possibly be a child, or a youth, or a grown-up man in all Israel who had not often sat at Samuel's feet and drunk in his divine words. But the most public men, after all, have only their own public. Saul staggers us and throws us out till we look at ourselves and at the men round about us, and then we soon see, what had before been obscure to us, that our inborn and indulged tastes, likings, dispositions, inclinations, and pursuits rule us also, shape us, occupy us, and decide for us the men we know and the life we lead. Josephus says that Samuel had an inborn love of justice. But Saul had inherited from Kish an inborn and an absorbing love of cattle and sheep; and, till they were lost, Saul had no errand to Samuel's city. Why hold up our hands at Saul's obscurity, and at Saul's ignorance of Samuel? We have it in ourselves. We also see what we bring eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to love. To go no further; take just yesterday's journals. They were full of good books. They were full of public meetings, lectures, classes, sermons, speeches, till reading men, and thinking men, and men set on their own self-improvement and their own salvation from sin, do not know where to turn or what to do next, the doors of life are so many and so wide open. Let him who passed all that before him yesterday, and then laid out all this week, redeeming all the time, that he might read the best and hear the best—let that man, and let no other man, cast the first stone at stupid Saul and his stupid father. For Saul was not more stupid among the pastures of Benjamin

than we are among the churches, and the classes, and the libraries, and the reading-rooms, and the booksellers' shops of Edinburgh. 'Behold now,' said Saul's servant when the asses were hopelessly lost, 'there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man: all that he saith cometh surely to pass; now, let us go thither.' If you have no more sense of religion and life than Saul and his father had, at least, like them, see that you have a religious servant. Saul's servant knew Samuel. Saul's servant had sat at Samuel's feet as often as he had a holiday. He had bargained with Kish for a day now and then to see Samuel when he was on circuit, and to hear the prophet when he preached. And your servant who stipulates to get out to church, and takes less wages in order to do so, he will be able to tell you where the Seer lives when you have lost all, and yourself to the bargain. Insignificant people—the sacred writer does not even know that servant's name—have sometimes most important information. Saul was led up to the door of his earthly kingdom by the piety of his father's servant; and you may be led up some day to the door of the heavenly kingdom by one of your servants who has interests and acquaintances and experiences that up to to-night you know nothing about.

After Samuel had anointed Saul to the kingdom, we come upon this very obscure Scripture: 'And it was so that when Saul had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave Saul another heart, and the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and he prophesied.'

Saul, you exclaim, a prophet! Saul with 'another heart'! Saul with the Spirit of God upon him! You cannot understand. No. But words must be read in the light of facts; and Bible words in the light of Bible facts. Profession must be judged by practice, and faith shown by works. And 'another heart' judged what it is by what comes out of it. Nay, prophecy itself is only a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal if the prophet has not charity. 'Another heart' has more meanings than one in Holy Scripture; and so has the Spirit of God; and so has prophecy. Isaiah prophesied of the atoning death of Christ, but so did Caiaphas. The Spirit of God came upon Jesus at the Jordan, but He came also upon Samson at the camp of Dan, and upon Balaam beside the altar of Baal. Matthew Henry in two or three words makes clear to us all the obscurity of Saul's 'other heart.' 'Saul,' says the most sensible of commentators, 'has no longer the heart of a husbandman, concerned only with corn and cattle; he has now the heart of a statesman, a general, a prince. When God calls to service He will make fit for it. If He advances to another station, He will give another heart; and will preserve that heart to those who sincerely desire to serve Him.' So He will. But that is just what Saul, another heart and all, did not sincerely desire to do. And here hangs the true key to the whole of Saul's sad history. He was elected and crowned king over Israel, but he was as ignorant all the time of the God of Israel as he was of Samuel, the great prophet of the God of Israel. The Spirit

of God came upon Saul for outward and earthly acts, but never for an inward change of heart. Saul prophesied, whatever that may mean; what he said has not been thought worthy of preservation; but after he had so prophesied he relapsed and remained the same man he had been before. Saul was like ninety-nine out of a hundred of us preachers. The truth is, another heart, prophetic spirit and all, Saul all along was little better than a heathen at heart. And hence it is that what has often been called the profanity of Saul's character scarcely rises to the dignity of profanity. Saul's most presumptuous sins scarcely attain to profaneness. You must have some sense of what is sacred before you can be really profane. But Saul has no such sense. In his youth he had not one spark of insight or interest in the religious life and worship of Israel. He had never heard of Samuel. What he could not but hear he immediately forgot. When his sin found him out, and when salvation was at his very door, the poor graceless castaway had no higher request to make of Samuel than this: 'Honour me, I pray thee, before the people.' All sure marks of a man who has not learned the very first principles of the divine life. No. Saul the anointed king of Israel had all the time neither part nor lot in the true kingdom of God. At the same time, in giving Saul another heart, the God of Israel gave Saul the greatest opportunity of his life to make himself a new heart. God suddenly made a break in the ungodly and heathenish life of the son of Kish. So much so that Saul for the moment

was almost persuaded to become an Israelite indeed. Saul all his days was never so near the kingdom of heaven as when he said to Samuel, 'Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of Benjamin? Wherefore, then, speakest thou so to me?' That is the language of a man whose heart is really touched for the time with divine grace. That is real humility; and humility is the root of all the graces, both natural and supernatural. And had Saul only dwelt on that thought; had he returned all his days to that thought; that thought dwelt upon and added to at every new occasion and fresh proof of God's goodness and his own ill deserts—that would soon have made Saul's heart a new heart; that would soon have made Saul another man. But it was not so to be with Saul. As time went on, and as trials and temptations beset Saul, a hard and stony heart, a spirit of rebellion, and pride, and envy, and jealousy, and despair took possession of Saul, and held possession of Saul to his terrible end.

No; there is no such obscurity about Saul getting another heart and yet that heart coming to nothing. We have all had the same thing in ourselves. We ourselves have gone out on an errand of duty or of pleasure, and have come back with another heart. We were for the time like new creatures. Very little more at that time would have made us new creatures altogether. Such surprises of providence, such opportunities of making ourselves a new heart, are occurring continually. Sometimes it has been

at a time of sorrow, and sometimes at a time of joy and gladness. At the death of a father or a mother; at the time of leaving home to take our place in a lonely world; or, again, at that happy time when our loneliness was so graciously dealt with by God. God, I feel sure, lets no man become a married man, for instance, without giving him the great opportunity and the new start in religion He gave to Saul when He made him king of Israel. In the kingly heart that God gives to every bridegroom we are not far for the time from the kingdom of heaven. No man, the most heathen of men, ever became a bridegroom and a married man without having opportunities and intentions and commencements of a new heart and a better life. We have all had times when our hearts were too big for our bosoms. And at such times we were almost persuaded to become Christian men. Yes; at one time or other, and more than once, you have all had Saul's great opportunity. Did you or did you not embrace it? The bare remembrance of those times of another heart all but brings them back again. Bring them back. You can. You still can, if you choose. And though their first impression must be somewhat faded and spent, let your resolution in God be all the greater that even yet you are determined to make yourself a new heart out of them. Determine to do it, and God will see it done. Say it, and see if He will not.

God show

Had Saul's change of heart only held, had his conversion only become complete, Saul would have been one of the greatest of all the Old Testament

men. Saul was not a common man. He was a choice young man, and a goodly; there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he; from his shoulders upward he was higher than any of the people. He had a splendid body and a stately gait, and the very sins of his soul had a certain lurid grandeur about them also. After God gave Saul another heart his life was full for a time of the finest promise. What could have promised better than his strict silence to his inquiring uncle about his anointing by Samuel? Where a weaker man would have had his head turned and his tongue loosed, Saul told his uncle that the stray asses were at last found; but of the matter of the kingdom he was strictly silent. We are bound to put a good construction on Saul's silence in that matter. It is but fair and just to set Saul's silence that day down to humility and modesty. As also when he hid himself among the stuff on the day of his election. As also when he held his peace at the men of Belial mocking at his election. As also after his first great victory. Bring the men who say, Shall Saul rule over us, said the people, and put them to death this day. But Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day, for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel. If all that is not to be set down to Saul's humility, self-command, and magnanimity, not to say piety, then Saul's character is obscure indeed. We would have had no hesitation in setting all that down to the best motives had it not been that all his future so terribly belied all such modesty, humility, self-

command, magnanimity, and piety. The great preacher did not say it till he had felt it to be quite impossible to draw out Saul's obscure life into a consistent and open piece. And the more we work on Saul under that great preacher and after him, the more we feel the obscurity and the mystery of Saul's dark character. It would take a Shakespeare to put himself into Saul's place and let us see the obscure working of Saul's heart under all his temptations. But he has gone away and left us to deal with such characters as Esau, and Balaam, and Saul, and Judas for ourselves. Only, there is one dark passage toward the end of Saul's insane life that we need neither Shakespeare nor Newman to open up to us. Saul's mad and murderous envy of David is as clear as day to every man who puts its proper name on what goes on every day in his own evil heart.

Who is your Saul, my brethren? Who is the man that stands in the way of your promotion? Who sits in the seat that should by this time have been yours? Who is the man that casts the javelin of slander and detraction at your good name? Who has cost you home and friends by his spite, and malice, and jealousy? Mark that man. Never let your eye off that man. God will bring that man to your feet one day. He will lie under your sword some day soon. But touch not a hair of his head. Touch not the skirt of his robe, neither the spear at his bolster, nor the cruse at his side. Remember who and what you are. Remember what Name you bear, and walk worthy that day of that Name.

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Oh ! exclaims Thomas Shepard, the grievous shipwrecks of some great ships ! We see some boards and planks lying in the mud at low water, but that is all !

XXXV

DAVID—IN HIS VIRTUES

*ARISE, ANOINT HIM ·
FOR THIS IS HE*



JESSE the Bethlehemite, the father of David, and the far-off father of Jesus Christ, was the son of Obed, who, again, was the son of Boaz and Ruth. Jesse had an illustrious past to look back to. He was the tenth in direct descent from his father Jacob, and more than one shining name stood in his illustrious ancestry. But it is not his so illustrious past, it is the surpassing splendour of his future that makes us look with so much interest on David's father. We are not told as much about Jesse as we might like. He is already an old man when we first see him. And it is somewhat remarkable that we are told nothing at all about David's mother. The more so, that there would seem to have been nothing about Jesse to lead us on to think of him as either transmitting the extraordinary ability of his youngest son, or as discovering or fostering his youngest son's extraordinary gifts and character. Jesse's sole interest to us is in this, that he had David among his sons. We bow before the old Bethlehemite because of the branch that grew out of his roots.

Latest born of Jesse's race,
Wonder lights thy bashful face,
While the Prophet's gifted oil
Seals thee for a path of toil.

Twofold praise thou shalt attain,
In royal court and battle-plain,
Then comes heartache, care, distress,
Blighted hope, and loneliness ;
Wounds from friend and gifts from foe,
Dizzied faith, and guilt, and woe ;
Loftiest aims by earth defiled,
Gleams of wisdom sin-beguiled,
Sated power's tyrannic mood,
Counsels shared by men of blood,
Sad success, parental tears,
And a dreary gift of years.

For the Lord had said to Samuel, Fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite ; for I have provided Me a king among his sons. God sees not as man sees, and God works not as man works. In providing Him a king, God worked in a way strange and unlikely to our eyes. We would not have committed our coming king to Jesse to bring up. It was a strange school for a future king—the lonely sheepfolds of Bethlehem. So we think who look at the outward appearance. David was forgotten and neglected by his father ; he was scoffed at and trampled upon by his brothers ; but you cannot sour, or starve, or poison, or pervert a nature like David's. There is a well-spring of piety and of poetry in David that makes David independent of adverse circumstances. Nay, he takes prosperity out of adversity. That ruddy

stripling has his harp and his sling and his father's sheep, and what more does he need to make him happy? He has the glorious traditions of his far-off father Israel to dream about. Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Moses, and Joshua, and Jephthah, and Samuel: his poet's eye doth glance from the one to the other till they are all with him as he folds his flock under the stars of Bethlehem. 'Now, as they were going along and talking, they espied a boy feeding his father's sheep. The boy was in very mean clothes, but of very fresh and well-favoured countenance, and as he sat by himself he sang. Then said their guide, Do you know him? I will dare to say that this boy lives a merrier life, and wears more of that herb called heart's-ease in his bosom than he that is clad in silk and velvet. So they hearkened, and he sang:—

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want,
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.'

And, again, 'When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon, and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?' And, again, this: 'Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.' No; that was not an erroneous school for David. All his days the remembrance of those days was dear to him. A

draught of the water of the well of Bethlehem, even to old age, would make King David pure, and free, and young, and himself again.

‘And Saul’s servants said to him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord seek out a man who is a cunning player on an harp : and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well. Behold, answered one of Saul’s servants, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him. Wherefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep. And it came to pass, when the evil spirit was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.’ Browning’s *Saul* is a wonderful piece of writing. The colour, the movement, the insight, the passion of that piece are astonishing. What a gift is poetic genius! And how well laid out by Robert Browning. Let all young men be readers of Robert Browning, and imitators of David in *Saul* in this, that what David puts his hand to, you may depend upon it, he will carry that through. There is an inborn temper of masterfulness in David. David never does anything by halves. Energy, decision, resolution, devotion, finish, scorn of idleness, scorn of ease, love of labour, love of danger—you will always find virtues like these in young David.

Saul's servants had all heard of David. David's harp had sounded farther than David ever dreamed. Plenty of shepherd-boys had a harp, but there was no man in all Israel who could make his harp play and work cures of the mind like David. David was a man of strong passions, good and bad : but no passion in David's heart was stronger than the noble passion to do with all his might whatsoever his hand found to do. Harp, or sling, or sword, or sceptre, or psalmist's pen—it was all the same. David was a cunning man, and the Lord was with David. It would soon change the face of the world if all our young men would but determine to put on David's masterful mind. How much power is wasted ; how many talents are let rot ; how many opportunities are lost for ever for want of David's eager, onward, hopeful, masterful mind. How few men come to anything eminent, or distinguished, or praiseworthy. Jesse's son was not the only son in Israel who had an ear for music. But he was the only owner of an ear for music who did his very best by his ear. All the men in Saul's camp had the best-made slings hung at their belts, but it was the homeliest piece of skin and cord in all Israel that delivered the smooth stone into Goliath's forehead. How much half-finished work is gathering dust in all our houses ! How many books, bought or borrowed, and let fall out of sight unread ! How many costly instruments of music that nobody can play ! How many languages smattered over ! What heaps of sluggard's litter lying all around us ! How few of our children can translate a page to perfec-

tion, or polish a sentence, or play a tune, or patch a garment, or prepare or eat a meal so that you can say, The Lord is with them! In His name, what your hand finds to do, do it with all your might to Him who slumbers not nor sleeps. Whether it is learning a language, or preparing a speech, or singing a song, or composing a sermon or a prayer, or visiting a stair, or teaching and training up a class, or ploughing a furrow, or sweeping a house, lay it not down till you can say, It is finished.

The eighteenth chapter of First Samuel contains some of the most difficult and dangerous passages in David's whole life, and four times in that single chapter David's wisdom is remarked on. David, we read, went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely. And after the foolish women had aroused Saul's envy and endangered David's life with their thoughtless songs and silly dances, we read again that David behaved himself wisely in all his ways. Wherefore, when Saul saw that David behaved himself very wisely, Saul was afraid of David. And then, summing up David's residence at Saul's difficult and dangerous court, the sacred writer says that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was much set by. I feel certain that the extravagant and ill-considered songs of the excited women pained David far more deeply than they pained Saul. Their coarse chants must have grated painfully on David's finely-strung heart. Their singing and dancing drove Saul mad. But all that—the women's folly and the king's jealousy—only

made David a wiser and a wiser man every new day. If David could have shut the mouths of these mischief-making women, how willingly would he have done it. They could not understand what was the matter with the usually so open David, the victorious captain who rode past them in silence, and with a dark cloud on his countenance. It says much for David, and it says no little for the sound public opinion of Israel in that day, that David's name was so celebrated for his wisdom. Men of a cold, cautious, reserved character far sooner gain and far easier keep the name of wise men than their fellows do who are of warmer feelings and more generous impulses. The fulness and the openness of some men's hearts obscure to the multitude the lucidity and the solidity of their minds. We are ready to think the man wise and able who is silent, and reserved, and proud, and whose temper and tongue are edged in all he says and does with slight and scorn of other men. The warm-hearted man is a far wiser man than the cold-hearted man ever can be, but it takes a warm heart and a wise to see that. David must have had great strength of character and great solidity of judgment, and he must have had good and honest hearts round about him, fully appreciating him, and guiding public opinion concerning him, when, with so much openness, friendliness, geniality, and humility, he gained such a name for prudence and wisdom. The voice of the people is sometimes, after all, the voice of God.

David's fine humility is beautifully brought out in the matter of his marriage. Saul's diabolical

design was to get David murdered in connection with his marriage. But, without having discovered that, David's humility of heart and delicacy of mind became, unknown to himself, a shield to save his life. A less humble, a less noble man, might very well, in David's place, have given loose reins to his imagination and his ambition, and let himself dream about the king's daughter. The more so, that, after the coarse custom of the time, Saul had promised his daughter to the man who should rid him of Goliath. And David had done that. But it had never entered David's fondest dreams that King Saul should fulfil his proclamation to an obscure man like him. Nay; even when Saul thought he saw a way of getting David killed in connection with his marriage, David scorned the proposal of the plotters. They might think as meanly of Saul and Saul's house as they chose; but let them not so speak to the king's armour-bearer. 'Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son-in-law, seeing that I am but a poor man, and lightly esteemed!' David has not forgotten his father's house. David has more place and honour already than he knows how to bear. He would lay it all down and return to the sheepfolds of his youth if he only could. Whatever he may be to those foolish women, David is no hero to himself. To himself he is still the youngest son of Jesse the Bethlehemite. Well may Solomon say, looking back with a son's pride to his father's character and career, By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life.

It is to David's lasting honour also that the land

of Israel was not plunged into all the horrors of civil war. His men were increasing in numbers every day, and their extraordinary devotion to David, added to the rankling of their own wrongs, made them ready for anything. David's self-restraint was the one thing that stood between Saul and the loss of his throne and the loss of his life. It happened one day about that time that David and his outlawed men were hiding in a cave among the rocks of the wild goats, when, as Providence would have it, Saul, who was pursuing David, came up to that very cave to sleep. Now is David's opportunity. The Lord, said David's men, hath to-day delivered your enemy into your hand. David drew his sword and stepped down to where the sleeping king lay, and cut off the skirt of Saul's garment, and withdrew again into the darkness. His men wondered why he had not brought the king's head in his hand instead of the lappet of his robe. When Saul rose from his sleep and left the cave, David went to the mouth of the cave and called out, My lord, the king! Think of Saul's feelings when he looked up and saw David, whom he was hunting to death, standing on the spot where he had just risen from sleep, and standing with his sword in one hand and the skirt of Saul's robe in the other. When Saul looked up, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself. And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words against me? See the skirt of thy robe in my hand, and know that though some bade me kill thee, mine eye spared thee; for I said,

I will not put forth mine hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed. Is this thy voice, David? exclaimed Saul. My son David, thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil!

In the court, in the camp, in the caves of Engedi and Adullam, on the throne, in the sanctuary—all hearts, good and bad, fly open in David's presence. Like his New Testament Son, David's life, in its way, was the light of men. We see all the men and women of David's day in the light of David. All who come near David, ever after their hearts are naked and open to us. Saul, Jonathan, Merab, Michal, Nabal, Abigail, Abner, Joab, Uriah, Nathan, Shimei, Absalom, Solomon—we see them all in the light of David's blazing presence among them. There are some men who shut up every heart that comes near them. They chill, and cramp, and shut up every heart. But David warmed, and enlarged, and enriched, and lighted up, for good or for evil, every heart that came into his generation. Even Saul is no longer obscure after David enters Saul's court. It was David's heart. It was his talents; it was his character; it was his virtues; sometimes it was his vices; but it was always his heart. It was his heart; it was his love; it was his magnificent and unparalleled power of sympathy. It was the divine nature in David: it was Jesus Christ in David long before Jesus Christ came. Bring my soul out of prison, sang David in one of his most solitary and forsaken psalms. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name.

The righteous shall compass me about; for Thou shalt deal bountifully with me. How well that prayer and hope was fulfilled in Israel: and how well it is fulfilled still among ourselves let David's psalms testify. Look how the righteous everywhere compass about David the sweet psalmist of Israel. Arise, anoint him: for this is he.

XXXVI

DAVID—IN HIS VICES

THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN

BUTLER has a sermon on self-deceit which you should all read till you have it by heart. If you will listen to him, Butler will prove to you and will convince you that self-deceit, or internal hypocrisy, as he sometimes calls it, is the greatest of all your guilt, and is, in addition, the corruption of your whole moral character. He will show you also, in a way that will startle you, that David was guilty of this worst of all sins beyond any other saint or sinner in all the Bible. In Butler's sober, but most convincing and most solemnising words, David's is the most prodigious instance of the very wickedest and the very deadliest of all the vices of the vicious heart of man. All David's other vices were but skin wounds and surface sores that might soon have been bound up; at their worst, to borrow David's own words about them, they were but so many broken bones. But David's self-deceit was deep-seated, and it would have been deadly to David but for Nathan, or, rather, but for the LORD. As for David's fall, let it not be once named among you, as becometh

saints. But, past speaking about as David's fall was, it was what followed his fall that so displeased the Lord. In the words of Butler's latest editor, 'it is safer to be wicked in the ordinary way than from this corruption lying at the root.' As Thomas Goodwin points out in his great treatise on the *Aggravation of Sin*, it was the 'matter of Uriah,' even more than the matter of Bathsheba, that awakened the anger of the Lord against David. That is to say, it was David's sin of deliberation and determination, rather than his sin of sudden and intoxicating passion. It was both matters; it was both sins; but it cannot be overlooked that it was after a twelvemonth of self-deceit, internal hypocrisy, and self-forgiving silence on David's part that Nathan was sent to David in such divine indignation. How a man like David could have lived all that time soaked to the eyes in adultery and murder and not go mad is simply inconceivable. That is to say, it would be inconceivable if we had not ourselves out of which to parallel and illustrate David, and thus to make David both possible and natural to us. Before you begin to read and think; as long as you confine your reading and thinking to the reading and thinking of children and fools, you will think it impossible that all the self-deceitfulness and internal hypocrisy that could possibly be in David and in the devil taken together, could have so blinded David to the blackness of his sin, and to the absolute certainty of God's dreadful judgments. But when you become a man in the books you read, and in the matters of your own

heart; and especially in the superlative deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of your own heart, you will stop all your childish exclamations over David, and will say to yourself, I myself am David; I myself am that self-deceiving man. 'What the particular circumstances were with which David extenuated his crimes, and quieted and deceived himself, is not related.' No. They are not related; but we may guess at some of them to our own self-discovery and self-advantage. David would say to himself such things as these: 'I am the king, and Uriah and his wife are both my servants. All that he has is mine. She is not for such as he. She should be a queen, and she shall be. And I can make it up to him, and I will.' And then, after that, there was Uriah's disobedience and insolence to his king; his open disloyalty and his boasted indifference to his king's discovery and disgrace. 'Yes, the sword devoureth one as well as another,' David would say. 'And it might have devoured Uriah even if I had not written that letter.' And then, to repay, and repair, and cover it all up, David fetched the woman to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. And, besides all that, it was all past: and why go back upon the past? David, you may be sure, had all these, and many more than all these, 'distinctions to fence with.' And then, what was wanting in all that, himself came in to complete and carry off the case; self, 'the most disingenuous and abominable principle that ever was.' Self, that utterly ungodly, diabolical, inhuman, inconceivably wicked, and detestable thing

that was so strong in David and is so strong in you and in me. He who watches the workings of self in his own mind and heart he will not be forward to throw a stone at David: he will not be surprised at anything he reads about David or any other man. He will not wonder either at David's fall or at his subsequent self-deceit. I can fully, and down to the bottom, study the curse and shame and pain of self in no other heart but in my own; not even in David's heart. And I am warned of God that, with all my study and all my watchfulness and all my prayerfulness, the deceitfulness and the internal hypocrisy of my own heart will still deceive me. Well, all I shall say in answer to that is this, that if my heart is worse than I know it to be, then the God of all grace, with all the blood of His Son, and with all the patience and power of His Spirit, help me! Me, and all men like me; if there is another man like me in this matter on earth or in hell. My brethren, beware how you shield yourself from yourself, and use 'distinctions' when you are conversing with your conscience about yourself. To be pointed at, and told to his face that he was unclean, and cruel, and cowardly, and guilty of blood, was David's salvation. And to have some one injured enough and angry enough; or friendly and honest and kind enough, to call you to your face false, or cruel, or envious, or malicious, or hard-hearted, or ignorant and narrow-minded and full of prejudice and party-spirit, or sycophantic to the great, and supercilious and harsh to the poor, or all that together, might be

the beginning of your salvation. And would he then be your enemy who first told you that saving truth? Surely you will not think it. Let the righteous smite me, and it shall be a kindness. Let him reprove me, and it shall be an excellent oil that shall not break my head. But, far best of all, let my conscience smite me, and about my self-love and my self-deceit in me.

Butler points out at the same time that, portentous as David's internal hypocrisy and self-deceit was, it was all the time local and limited in David. That is to say, his self-deceit had not as yet spread over and corrupted his whole life and character. There was real honesty in David all this self-deceiving time. David gave scope, in Butler's words, to his affections of compassion and goodwill, as well as to his passions of another kind. And, while this is some comfort to us to hear, there is a great danger to us in this direction also. The whited sepulchres fasted twice in the week, and they gave tithes of all that they possessed. They made broad their phylacteries, and made long prayers, and were always to be seen in the synagogues, with their mint and anise and cumin. They made clean, no men made so clean, the outside of the cup and platter. Many of them had begun, like David, with only one thing wrong in their life; but it was a thing that they hushed up in their own consciences, till by that time the self-deceit was spreading and was well-nigh covering with death and damnation their whole life and character. David was rescued from that appalling end; but

he was fast on the way to that end when the Lord arrested him. David all the time was administering justice and judgment as boldly, and with as much anger at evil-doers, as if there had never been a man of the name of Uriah on the face of the earth. And just because he was making men who had no pity restore the lamb fourfold ; just because of that he was more and more confirmed in his own self-deceit. We would need Nathan and his parable at this point. Only, your self-deceit would make you miss his point, till he drove it home into your deceitful heart. You are the man. You are all the more severe with one class of sinners that you sin yourself so much with another and opposite class. You are terrible to see and hear on the sins of the flesh, because you are up to the eyes in the far more fatal sins of the mind. You despise and detest publicans and sinners, while you dine and sup and plot against Christ with Pharisees and internal hypocrites. We all turn away our eyes and our ears from parables like that. Yes, but Butler warns us that it is as easy to close the eyes of the mind as those of the body, as, also, that though a man has the best eyes in the world, he cannot see in any direction but in that to which he turns his eyes. Let the man, then, who would discover his own self-deceit, if there is one such here, let him turn his eyes in upon his own heart, and especially let him turn his eyes in the opposite direction in his own heart to that in which his easy and untempted virtue displays itself.

But so bold, and towering, and self-deceived is

our self-deceit, that it invades and entrenches itself, not in the matters of morals only; it comes to its fulness and to a positive grandeur in our devotions; in our daily dealings with God Himself. Nothing can be more open and notorious than the self-deceit and utter hypocrisy of our psalms and our prayers. David says, and he says it, no doubt, from his own devotional experience, that if he regards iniquity in his heart, the Lord will not hear him. How much less would the Lord have heard him if he had carried out his iniquity openly, and had put all the deepest deceit of his heart into his psalms and his prayers, as we do. I do not read that David composed any penitential psalms during those self-deceiving twelve months. And yet there is no saying. There is no limit to the sacrilege and profanity of an internal hypocrisy. Be that as it may, if David did not, we do. What could be more self-deceitful than our public worship in this house? Stop and think over the next psalm that is given out, and say if you have forehead enough to sing it after you understand it. And, whether you do that or no, let any man venture to accept your psalm as sincere, and attempt to deal with you accordingly, and you will open his eyes. Let him venture with a counsel, or a correction, or a warning, or a reproof, and he will not take you at your word in the church or in the prayer-meeting again. Woe to the man who believes that you are in earnest as you prostrate yourself before God and man in your psalms and prayers. You will soon undeceive him if he thinks that you are broken and contrite in heart, or meek

and lowly in heart, or that you lack wisdom, love the cross, wait for light, and are the little children of the kingdom of heaven. 'Julius goes to prayers, he confesses himself to be a miserable sinner, he accuses himself to God with all the aggravations that can be, as having no health in him; yet Julius cannot bear to be informed of any imperfection, or suspected to be wanting in any degree of virtue. Now, can there be stronger proof that Julius is wanting in the sincerity of his devotions? Is not this a plain sign that his confessions to God are only words of course, an humble civility of speech to his Maker, in which his heart has no share? If a man was to confess that his eyes were bad, his hands weak, his feet feeble, and his body helpless, he would not be angry with those that supposed he was not in perfect strength, or that he might stand in need of some assistance. Yet Julius confesses himself to be in great weakness, corruption, disorder, and infirmity, and yet is angry at any one that does but suppose his defection in any virtue. Is it not the same thing as if he had said, You must not imagine that I am in earnest in my devotion?'

He was a happy preacher whose pulpit awakened David and brought David back to God. Nathan took his life in his hand that day. But he had his reward. And what a reward it was! Think of having David's soul set down to your account at the great day! What shall we ourselves owe to Nathan at that day for that sermon? We would never have had David's psalms but for Nathan's sermon. And what should we have done,

I cannot conceive, without David's psalms. Preaching is magnificent work if only we could get preachers like Nathan. If our preachers had only something of Nathan's courage, skill, serpent-like wisdom, and evangelical instancy. But even Nathan himself would be helpless with some of you. You would have turned upon Nathan; you would have taken his good name and his life; you would have written a letter about him to Joab at Rabbah. Brutus never read a book but to make himself a better man. When will that be said about your coming to church? Happy the preacher who has so much as one Brutus a Sabbath day among his hearers! Happy the preacher who has a David among his hearers from time to time, so that he can pass on and say to him, The Lord also hath put away thy sin! We ministers must far more study Nathan's method; especially when we are sent to preach awakening sermons. Too much skill cannot be expended in laying down our approaches to the consciences of our people. Nathan's sword was within an inch of David's conscience before David knew that Nathan had a sword. One sudden thrust, and the king was at Nathan's feet. What a rebuke of our slovenly, unskilful, blundering work! When we go back to Nathan and David, we forget and forgive everything that had been evil in David. The only thing wanting to make that day in David's life perfect was that Nathan should have had to come to David. Now, what will make this the most perfect day in all your life will be this, if you will save the Lord and His

prophet all that trouble, so to speak, and be both the Lord and His prophet to yourself. Read Nathan's parable to yourself till you say, I am the man! And so ever after with every parable, and with every psalm, and with every prayer, and with everything of that kind. When we preach anything of that kind, all the time we are preaching, be you fast kindling your own anger against yourself. And as soon as we are done preaching, speak you out in yourself and at yourself, and say, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die. And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And, always, when the thirty-second psalm is announced to be sung, and when innocent men and women and children are getting their instruments of music ready, be you getting yourself ready till you cannot wait for them. Blessed is the man!—lead the congregation, and sing. And, when, by a happy inspiration the fifty-first psalm is again given out, do you ejaculate up to David's God your daily thankfulness that there is such a psalm in existence. For it is new to you every morning and every night. Just hear a verse of it, and say if it is not. 'Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.' 'I conceal nothing,' sobbed out Bishop Lancelot Andrewes every Lord's Day morning before he could face his congregation and his

clergy. 'I make no excuses. I denounce against myself my sins. Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord, and thus and thus have I done. O Lord, I have destroyed myself. And Thou art just in all that has come upon me. I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. I abhor and bruise myself that my penitence, Lord, O Lord, is not deeper. Help Thou mine impenitence, and more, and still more, pierce Thou, rend, and crush my heart. Magnify Thy mercies toward the chief of sinners, and say to me, Thy sins are forgiven thee. Say, O God, unto my soul, I am thy salvation!'

And, then, David's 'way of lying.' Did any of you ever suppress and keep silent about your principles, say, at an election time? Did you ever hedge and double in your public life in order to get a post, or in order to stand well with those who have posts and pieces of bread to give away? Did you ever tune a speech or a sermon or a prayer to turn away the anger of a man whose anger you feared, or with an eye to a man you wished to stand well with? Or, did you ever 'tell a vain lie upon yourself,' ascribing something falsely or exaggeratingly to yourself through vanity or other self-interest? And, alongside of that, when and where did you last put forward, or allow another to put forward, a detracting word about your friend or about your rival, and hold back what you felt would be for his advantage? Then, the story of David and the priest of Nob is, in that case, written for your learning. You will see in that chapter how David obtained hallowed bread of Ahimelech, and what that bread cost Ahimelech

and his house. 'Remove from me the way of lying, and grant me Thy law graciously. He points to the sore of his guileful heart,' says Goodwin, 'wherein his grief lay. David, among other corruptions, had a lying spirit sometimes.'

Or, again, were you ever driven to simulate sickness, or even madness, in order to get out of some dreadful crime or scrape you had fallen into? See, then, God's compassion for you at David's cost, in His having had that so humiliating chapter put into your Bible. What a state of mind must David have been in that day when the servants of King Achish led David like a madman or a wild beast to the borders of their land, and then let him loose, as you would let loose and hound out a madman or a wild beast you were terrified at! O what a bottomless mystery and misery and agony of sin and shame the heart of man is, and most of all the heart of a man after God's own heart! From the same fountain will spring forth, on sufficient temptation and opportunity, the noblest deeds, and the most debasing and despicable. Had it not been in the Bible, we would have denounced that chapter as the cruellest, the most blasphemous, and the most utterly impossible slander. And, then, to have two splendid psalms as the immediate outcome of that sickening chapter! Truly they would need to be men in understanding, and not children, who read the Bible. For,

Not in their brightness, but their earthly stains,
Are the true seed vouchsafed to earthly eyes,
And saints are lowered that the world may rise.

XXXVII

DAVID—IN HIS GRACES

A MAN AFTER MINE OWN HEART

R. THOMAS GOODWIN says that David's youthful virtues differed from his old-age graces somewhat as wild marjoram differs from sweet. Now, the wild marjoram is little better to begin with than a useless wandering weed ; whereas the sweet is a planted, a protected, and a most precious herb. Your meekness, and your humility, and your industry, and so on, proceeds the incomparable Puritan preacher, must spring up, not only out of your constitution and your temperament ; it must spring up out of your heart, as your heart is more and more softened, and tamed, and humbled, and sweetened by the grace of God and by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. Many a man, the sometime President of Magdalene is continually warning us, may live and die a model and a praise of 'civil virtues,' who never all his days comes within sight of the first principles of gospel holiness. At the same time, marjoram is marjoram, whether it is found running wild on the sides of the hills, or is watched over, and weeded, and watered, and gathered till it makes our whole house full of sweet-

ness and health with its odorous fragrance. And teachableness, and meekness, and gentleness, and submissiveness, and thankfulness, and suchlike, are what they are, even before they are engrafted on Him who is the true and original root both of our wild and fast-fading flowers, as well as of our most fragrant and most fruitful herbs.

I would fain begin David's shining graces by saying that faith in God is the true and real and living root of them all. I would fain begin with David's faith, were it not that there is no word in all our tongue that carries less meaning and less vision to most people's minds and hearts than just this so frequent sound—faith. As Pascal says, We all believe in that dead word God; but there is only one here and another there who really and truly believes in the living, ever-present, and all-present God. But this is David's shining distinction above all God's saints—unless there are two or three in the New Testament who equal and excel David. In his pure, courageous, noble youth; all through his hunted-down days; fallen and broken and full of the pains of hell; filling up his dreary gift of years,—David is always the same unconquered miracle of faith in God. Take and read and hear what David says to the Philistine giant about God, and you will see somewhat of his youthful faith in God. Then pass on to far on in his life, and open the hundred and thirty-ninth psalm; and I am safe to say that David, the author of that psalm, and Jesus of Nazareth, whom I may call the finisher of it, have been the only two saints and sons of God

on the face of this earth who have ever taken up, understood, and imaginatively and unceasingly employed in their prayers that great believing psalm. And therefore it has been that they are the only two, father and son, to whom a voice came from heaven saying, Thou art a man after Mine own heart, and, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Jesus Christ was out of sight the greatest and the best believer this earth has ever seen. But the best of it is that He was beholden to David's psalms of faith, and trust, and resignation, and assurance to support and to give utterance to His faith in His Father. The psalms of David, says Isaac Williams, were our Lord's constant prayer-book. When, therefore, you begin to ask after and to enter on the life of faith, open and read David's life and David's psalms, comparing them together; and then pass on to Jesus Christ, and then to the Apostle Paul. 'Faith is the modestest of all the graces,' says the princely preacher I began with, 'and, at the same time, it is the most masterful. Wherever true faith is, it frameth the heart to the most childlike and friendlike dispositions towards God. Faith, my brethren, is a passion; it is a strong and a commanding instinct of our hearts after Christ, and after mystical union with Christ, so that we cannot be at peace and satisfied without Him.'

But, who is that roaring all the day long on the murderous wheel? Who is that stretched and stretched again on the rack all night till all his bones are out of joint—out of joint and broken in

pieces with the hammer and the anger of God? The voice of whose roaring is that—According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions? And that—For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me? Do you ask who that is? Do you not know? That is the prodigal son of the Old Testament. That is the same man who sometime went out against the giant, and against the bear, and against the lion in the name and in the strength of God. That is the anointed of the Lord. That is the King of Israel. That is the man after God's own heart. And he lies roaring on the rack—

Thus on us to impress
The portent of a blood-stained holiness.

For, holiness it still is; a true, a great, and an ever-growing holiness, though a holiness ever after to be stained with blood; but, also, to the end to be washed whiter than the snow in better blood. And a holiness, too, with a height, and a depth, and a fire, and an inwardness, and a solemnity, and a far-sounding psalmody in it, all of which would seem scarcely to be attainable in this life unless under the stain of blood, or of something that stains still worse than blood. Dreadful sin! that can only be propitiated by blood, and then washed off heart and life by blood upon blood! Dreadful holiness! that can only be attained through tears and blood! But, blessed holiness that is still attainable by us all at that, or at any other price possible to be paid by God or man! As David's holiness was, and as

all their holiness is, to whom David is set forth as a portent, and at the same time as an encouragement.

I was always exceedingly pleased with that saying of Chrysostom, says Calvin, 'The foundation of our philosophy is humility.' And yet more pleased with that of Augustine: 'As,' says he, 'the rhetorician being asked what was the first thing in the rules of eloquence, he answered, Delivery. What was the second? Delivery. What was the third? still he answered, Delivery. So if you ask me concerning the graces of the Christian character, I would answer firstly, secondly, and thirdly, and for ever, Humility.' And thus it is that God sets open His school for teaching us humility every day. Humility is the grace of graces for us sinners to learn. There is nothing again like it, and we must have a continual training and exercise in it. You learn to pronounce by your patrons complaining that they cannot hear you, and that they must carry their cases to another advocate unless you learn to speak better. And, as you must either please your patrons or die of starvation, you put pebbles in your mouth and you go out to recite to yourself by the river-side till your rhetoric is fit for a Greek judge and jury to sit and hear. And so with humility, which is harder to learn than the best Greek accent. You must go to all the schools, and put yourself under all the disciplines that the great experts practise, if you would put on true humility. And the schools of God to which He puts His great saints are such as these. You will be set second to other men

every day. Other men will be put over your head every day. Rude men will ride roughshod over your head every day. God will set his rudest men, of whom He has whole armies, upon you every day to judge you, and to find fault with you, and to correct you, and to blame you, and to take their business away from you to a better—to a better than you can ever be with the best pebbles that ever river rolled. Ay, He will take you in hand Himself, and He will set you and will keep you in a low place. He will set your sins in battle-array before your face. He will exact silence, and your mouth in the dust, and a rope on your head, and your heart a pool of tears, long after you had thought that you were to be set in a wealthy place. But let me say David at once. For it is David who rises before me as I speak of injuries, and insults, and detractions, and depreciations, and threats, and yet sorer, and yet severer and more immediate handlings by God Himself. David might have put Joab, and Shimei, and all the rest of his tutors and governors, in the front of the battle as he put Uriah; but he could not cast a piece of a millstone on his Maker from the walls of Rabbah, and he would not now if he could. And no more will he seek to silence a single one of his many reminders and accusers; no, not the most malignant, insolent, and unceasing of them all.

Once let David, or any other man, begin to taste the heavenly sweetness of true humility over against pride, and over against rebellion, and over against retaliation, and he will become positively enamoured

and intoxicated with his humiliations. What once was death and hell to him will now be life and peace and salvation to him. What at one time he had almost committed murder to cover up, he will now hearken for from every housetop. When I was a child I used every Sabbath-day to read David's challenge to the giant, and I thought I was sanctifying the Sabbath over that Scripture. But for many years now, and more and more of late years, my Bible opens of itself to me at the place where Shimei casts stones and dirt at David, till David says, So let him curse, because the Lord hath said to him, Curse David. My children still read Goliath on Sabbath evenings, but I am on the watch to see how soon I can safely introduce them to Shimei. Shimei is the man for me and mine! Only, may I endure my schoolmaster to the bitter end better than even David did. Let me take insults, and injuries, and slights, and slings from men, and God's hand itself, as David that day took Shimei's curses. Nay, things that would seem to you to have nothing in the world to do either with my past sins or with my present sinfulness—let me have David's holy instinct, let me lay down David's holy rule, to look at everything of that kind that comes to me as so many divine calls and divinely opened doors to a deeper humility. Graces also grow by what they feed on; and humility grows by deliberately dieting itself on such humiliations as these, both human and divine. And evangelical humility grows by being fed, and by feeding itself on evangelical humiliations. If any one has the steadiness of eye and the strength of

head, and the spiritual ambition and enterprise, to penetrate into this region of things, he will find a field rich in these and in many suchlike spiritual blessings in Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections*. I shall close up this grace of David by this specimen of mighty Edwards: 'Evangelical humiliation is the sense that a Christian man has of his own utter despicableness and odiousness, with an always answerable frame of heart. This humiliation is peculiar to true saints, for it is always accompanied with a sight of the transcendent beauty of divine things. And then, God's true saints all see, more or less, their own odiousness on account of sin, and the exceedingly hateful nature of all sin. Evangelical humiliation consists in a mean esteem of ourselves, as in ourselves nothing, and altogether contemptible and odious. This, indeed,' Edwards goes so far as to say, 'is the greatest and the most essential thing in all true religion.'

'The grey-haired saint may fail at last'; and the last sight we see of David is his deathbed shipwreck on that very same sunken rock he had steered past so often in the stormy voyage of his life. On his deathbed, David failed in that very grace which had been such a strength and such an ornament to his character on till now, and such a pride and such a boast to us. But the truth is, the only saint whose path has ever been as the shining light was not David, but David's far-off Son. And it was exactly where David so sadly struck and sank that his divine Son touched and attained to the top of His obedience, and gave to Himself the finishing

touch of His full sanctification. Father, forgive them, He said, and gave up the ghost. I do not know that of all the bad blood of which all our hearts are full there is any that lasts longer than anger, and resentment, and ill-will at our enemies, at our detractors, and at those who despise and deride us. It is only the cold, firm fingers of death that will squeeze the last dregs of that worst of all bad blood out of our hearts. We would draw the curtains of David's deathbed if we dared. But we dare not, and we would not if we could. For, after all, David is not our surety. David is not our righteousness. David did not die the just for the unjust. Nor at his very youngest and best is David set forward as an example to the disciples of Jesus Christ. David at his best, as at his worst, is one of ourselves. David is a man of like passions with ourselves. David was cut out of the same web, and he was shaped out of the same substance as ourselves. He was a man of like passions with us, and, like our passions, his were sometimes at his heel, but more often at his throat. David held back his bad passions at Saul, and at Shimei, and at Joab, occasion after occasion, till we were almost worshipping David. But, all the time, and all unknown to us, they were there. Till, of all times and of all places in the world, David's banked-up passions burst out on his deathbed, that no flesh might glory in God's presence. But that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. And, like David, we sometimes master somewhat and smother down our passions of resentment and

retaliation and ill-will. But with us as with David, at our best it is only a semblance and a surface of self-mastery. The bad blood is there still. And if it is not roaring in every vein as it used to do, the thick pestiferous dregs of it are all the more settled deep down in our hearts. Jeremiah is entirely right about us. He is divinely and entirely right about us. He is divinely and entirely right about the resentment, and the hatred, and the ill-will of our hearts at all who have ever hindered us, or injured us, or detracted from us, or rebuked us, or refused to flatter us. Yes, we will put our mouth in the dust, and a rope upon our head ; and, as at the day of judgment, we will tell the truth, and will say it in words which the Holy Ghost teacheth : Yes, we will say, my injured and resentful heart is desperately and deceivingly wicked. Desperately, and deceivingly, and down to death wicked. But no longer than that. No longer after death. After death we shall be done both with death and hell ; and after death we shall awake in His likeness who died, not cursing Judas, and Annas, and Caiaphas, and Herod, and the soldier with the spear, but saying over them all with His last breath, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. For even hereunto were we called.

There is one thing, so far as I remember, that David never failed or came short in. ‘My honest scholar,’ says Isaac Walton, when he is giving his companion a lesson in making a line and in colouring a rod, ‘all this is told you to incline you to thankfulness ; and, to incline you the more, let me tell you

that though the prophet David was guilty of murder and adultery, and many others of the most deadly sins, yet he was said to be a man after God's own heart, because he abounded more and more with thankfulness than any other that is mentioned in Holy Scripture. As may appear in his book of Psalms, where there is such a commixture of his confessing of his sins and unworthiness, and such thankfulness for God's pardon and mercies as did make him to be accounted, and that by God Himself, to be a man after His own heart. And let us, in that, labour to be as like David as we can. Let us not forget to praise Him for the innocent mirth and pleasure we have met with since we met together.' Would you know? asks William Law in his beautiful chapter on singing psalms—would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? Well, it is not he who prays most or fasts most; it is not he who gives most alms, or is most eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice; but it is he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God wills, and who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for His goodness. And then Law winds up with this, and I wish it would send you all to the golden works of that holiness-laden writer—Sometimes, he adds, imagine to yourselves that you saw holy David with his hands upon his harp, and his eyes fixed upon heaven, calling in transport upon all creation, sun and moon, light and darkness, day and night, men and angels, to join with his rapturous soul in praising the Lord

of heaven. Dwell upon this imagination till you think you are singing with this divine musician; and let such a companion teach you to exalt your heart unto God every new morning in his thanksgiving psalms. Or make a morning psalm suitable to your own circumstance out of David's great thanksgiving psalms. You should take the finest and the selectest parts of David's finest and selectest psalms, and adding them together make them every morning more and more fit to express your own thankful hearts. And, till you have had time to compose a psalm exactly suitable to your own standing in grace, you might meantime sing this psalm of David every morning with a spiritual mind and a thankful heart:

Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God,
And not forgetful be
Of all His gracious benefits
He hath bestow'd on thee.

For Thou art God that dost
To me salvation send,
And I upon Thee all the day
Expecting do attend.

XXXVIII

DAVID—IN HIS SERVICES

*WELL DONE, GOOD AND
FAITHFUL SERVANT*



OD is the only master with servants who accepts the intention for the action. God alone of all paymasters pays as good wages for the good intentions of His servants as He pays for their best performances. One of David's greatest and best services to God and man never went further than the good intention. But David was as much praised and as much paid for his good intention to build the temple as if he had lived to see the golden towers of God's house shining in the Sabbath sun. It will help on your salvation to lay it to heart that hell is paved with good intentions; and it will, at the same time, comfort every good and honest heart to be told that good intentions form some of the surest of stepping-stones to heaven. Think much about intentions. Give, and it shall be given you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete withal it shall be measured to you again. After which Bengel acutely annotates that it is by our hearts that we both mete out to others and

have it meted out to ourselves. It would have gone hard with the poor widow if she had only had a farthing meted out to her in her Lord's judgment on her. But her Lord looked on her heart. And thus it is that she sits in heaven to-day among the queens who sit there on their thrones of gold, because she had such a queenly heart that day in the temple porch. Both from David's intended temple; from the poor widow's actual collection at the door of David's temple; and from Bengel's spiritual annotation let us learn this spiritual lesson, that our hearts are the measure both of our work and of our wages in the sight of God. You cannot build and repair all the churches and mission-houses and manses at home and abroad you would like to build and repair. You cannot endow all the chairs of sacred learning you would like. You cannot contribute to the sustentation and spread of the Christian ministry as you would like. You cannot visit and relieve all the fatherless and widows in their affliction as you would like. You cannot stop all the sources of sin and misery in this world as you would like. You cannot make the reading, or the religion, or the devotional life of your people what your heart is full of. You wish you could. So did David. David had magnificent dreams about the temple. He built the temple every night in his sleep. And had he been permitted he would not have slept with his fathers till he had dedicated a most magnifical house to the name of the Lord. But it stands in God's true and faithful word that it was all in David's heart.

And He who looks not so much on the action as on the intention, He saw in this also a man after His own heart. May all David's good intentions, and generous preparations be found in all our rich people; and may all the widow's love and goodwill be found in all our poor people. For the heart is the measure. And as we measure out good words, and good wishes, and good purposes, and good preparations, and good performances in our heart, so will it be measured back to us by Him who sees and weighs and measures the heart and nothing but the heart.

‘Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build an house to My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight. But, behold, a son shall be born to thee, and his name shall be Solomon, and he shall build an house for My name.’ When I first read that sentence of such terrible disappointment to David, I looked to see David all that night on his face on the earth. But I did not know David; I had not yet got into all the depths of David's deep heart. For, instead of refusing to rise up and eat bread with the elders of his house, David was never in a happier frame of mind than he was all that night. David not only said, ‘It is the Lord,’ but his heart broke forth in a psalm such that there is nothing nobler in his whole book of Psalms. David not only consented that it was both good, and right, and seemly, that hands like his should not touch a stone of the house of God; but, that his son should be chosen of God to build Him

an house—that set David's heart on fire as never Old Testament heart was set on fire like David's heart. As we read the psalm that poured out of David's heart that chastised and disappointed day, David is a man after our own heart. A psalm of resignation, and self-sacrifice, and thanksgiving, and many other virtues and graces like that psalm, covers a multitude of David's sins. Then went David in, and sat before the Lord; and he said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God; but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? Would God we all had a heart like that! I have found David, my servant.

It makes it possible, and, more than possible, pleasant to a father to lie down and leave his work unfinished when he sees his son standing at his bedside ready to take up his father's unfinished work to finish it. Nay, I suppose a father who loved his son aright and enough would almost rather leave all his work and all his hope unfinished if he saw his son able and willing and chosen and called to take it up. This, no doubt, greatly helped David to resign his great hope of being spared to build the temple, that Solomon, his greatly-gifted, wise-hearted, pure, and noble-minded son was standing ready to take up and to carry out his father's long-intended task. Judging David that day by myself, David must have been a happy father and a thankful, as, indeed, the fine psalm he sang that

day lets us see that he was. I myself would willingly lie down to-night and leave all my mismanaged and mangled life; all the mistakes and misfortunes and mishaps of my ministry; all the obstacles and offences I have been to so many of my people; all my wrong dividing of the word of truth; and all else that you know so well and sorrow so much over. I declare to you that I would lie down with a good will to-night and wrap my head out of sight in my winding-sheet, if I saw my son standing ready to take up and repair and redeem my lost life. I would say, Lord, now lettest Thou Thy unfaithful and unfruitful and offensive and injurious servant depart in pardon, since mine eyes have seen Thy salvation begun in my son. And if I saw all my sons preparing for the ministry of Christ in the Church of Christ I would die in a far greater triumph than David's death-bed could possibly be. Well, why not?

Come, my soul, thy suit prepare.—
Thou art coming to a king;
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

David did many other services, both intended and executed, both in the field, and on the throne, and in the house of God; but by far and away David's greatest service was his Psalms. The temple was built, and built again, and built again; but for two thousand years now not one stone of that so sacred and so stately structure has stood upon another. The very foundations of the temple have

been razed out, sown with salt, and for ever lost. But the Psalms of David shine to this day with a greater splendour than on the day they were first sung. And long after the foundations of this whole earth shall have been ploughed up and removed out of their place, David's Psalms will be sounding out for ever beside the song of Moses and the Lamb. 'I have reared a monument of myself more lasting than brass.' And time, which has ground to powder so many temples of marble and of brass, has only set a more shining seal to the poet's proud boast. But how poor was his boast, and how short-lived will be his best work beside David's immortal Psalms! What a service has David done, not knowing that he was doing it; and not to his own nation only, but to the whole Israel of God. And not to Israel only, but to the God of Israel, and to the Redeemer of Israel. 'I have found David My servant, with My holy oil have I anointed him. I have exalted one chosen out of the people.'

I have said that David did a great service to the Redeemer of Israel, and I intended to say it. When I think of that service, all the other services that David has done by his Psalms shine out in a far diviner glory. I bless David's name for the blessing my own soul gets out of his Psalms every day I live. But when I trace that blessing up to its true source, I find that true and grace-gushing source in Jesus of Nazareth, whom I see growing in grace every day as He goes about in Galilee with David's Psalms never out of His hands. Think, people of God, of the honour to David, higher far

than all the thrones on earth and in heaven,—the unparalleled and immortal honour of being able to teach Jesus Christ to sing and to pray. For, when the Holy Child said to Mary, Mother, teach Me to sing and to pray, what did Mary do, hiding all that in her heart, but put into her Child's hands David's golden Psalm beginning thus: The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. And then, think of Him as He grew in wisdom, and in stature, and in strength of spirit beginning to discover Himself in this Psalm of David and in that. Think of the sweet start, the overpowering surprise, the solemnity, the rejoicing with trembling, the resignation, the triumph with which the growing Saviour was led of the Spirit from Psalm to Psalm till He had searched out all David's Psalms in which David had prophesied and sung concerning his Messiah Son. See Jesus of Nazareth on His knees in the Sabbath synagogue with this place open before Him for the first time,—Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within my heart. And, having once begun to read and to think in that way you will go on till you come to the cross, where you will see and hear your dying Redeemer with one of David's Psalms on His lips when He can no longer hold it in His hands. And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me. And they said one to another, Did not our

heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?

O two disciples, on your way that same day to Emmaus, how I envy you your travelling Companion that day! My heart burns to think of your Divine Companion opening up to you David's Messianic Psalms that memorable day. And when I think also of the multitudes that no man can number to whom David's Psalms have been their constant song in the house of their pilgrimage; in the tabernacle as they fell for the first time hot from David's heart and harp; in the temple of Solomon his son with all the companies of singers and all their instruments of music; in the synagogues of the captivity; in the wilderness as the captives returned to the New Jerusalem; in the New Jerusalem every Sabbath-day and every feast-day; in the upper room, both before and after supper; in Paul's prison at Philippi; in the catacombs; in Christian churches past number; in religious houses all over Christendom at all hours of the day and the night; in deserts, in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth; in our churches; in our Sabbath-schools; in our families morning and evening; in our sick-rooms; on our death-beds; and in the night-watches when the disciples of Christ watch and pray lest they enter into temptation. A service like all that is surely too much honour for any mortal man! Then David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house? And is this the manner of man, O Lord

God? And what can David say more unto thee! for Thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant.

Then, take David's knowledge of God, and his communion with God. There is nothing like it in the whole world again. There are many mysteries of godliness not yet revealed to us; but, to me, the mystery of David's knowledge of God and his communion with God is one of the most mysterious. Had Paul sung David's Psalms, and sent, now the twenty-third Psalm to the Philippians, and now the thirty-second and the hundred and thirtieth to the Romans, and now the forty-fifth and the seventy-second to the Colossians, and so on, I would not have wondered. I would wonder at nothing after the coming of Christ, and after His death and His ascension. But it baffles me to silence to see such Psalms as David's before the day of Christ. And I have never, with all my search, seen an intelligent attempt made to face that mystery.

No; David is scarcely second to the Man Jesus Christ Himself in this mystery of mysteries, the mystical communion of the soul of man with the Living God. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is so high that we cannot attain to it. 'O God, Thou art my God. Early will I seek Thee. My soul thirsteth for Thee; my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary. Because Thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful

lips when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches. My soul followeth hard after Thee.' That would not have stumbled me had I come on it in the heart of the seventeenth of John itself. To David in the sixty-second, and in its sister Psalms, there is only I AM and David himself, in all heaven and earth. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, David says in another Psalm. And, 'Thee, Thee only,' is the sum and the substance, the marrow and the fatness, the beauty and the sweetness of all David's communion Psalms. To know God, and to be in constant communion with God, this is life to David; this is better than life; this is love; this is blessedness. Then, again, it is told of Luther in his 'Table Talk,' that being asked one day which were his favourite Psalms—Why, to be sure, he answered, Paul's four Psalms,—'Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered,' 'Have mercy upon me, O God,' 'Out of the depths,' and 'Enter not into judgment with Thy servant.' Do you not see, he demanded, that all these Psalms tell us that forgiveness comes without the law and without works? Forgiveness and peace come to him that believeth. 'That Thou mayest be feared.' That dusts away all merit; that teaches us to uncover our heads before God and to confess that forgiveness is of His grace and not of our desert at all. 'Even as David describeth the righteousness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed is that man.' David knew it experimentally. It was Paul's privilege to

know it both historically and experimentally, as we say, and then to set it forth doctrinally, as we say also. And it is our privilege to have it in all these three ways, if we love and value such things above all other love and value. Even David without Paul was not made perfect. Nor will we be without them both. 'I have found David, My servant. And My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with him. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David.'

But, with all that, the half, and the best half for you, has not yet been told you. After all that, listen to this. He that hath ears to hear, let him give ear to this. 'In that day he that is feeble in Jerusalem shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God.' Does Feeble-mind hear that? Then let him receive and rest on that. Let him wake up psaltery and harp at the hearing of that. And let all that is within him sing and play like David. Let him sing and play, and that with the mind and the heart and the spirit like David. Let him sing and play to God, and to God only, like David. Let him who is feeble in faith, and in repentance, and in holiness, and in communion with God, be much in the Psalms. Let the Psalms dwell richly in the feeblest among us, and the feeblest among us will yet be a man of more spiritual strength than David. Sing a heart-strengthening Psalm every morning, and a heart-cleansing and a heart-quieting Psalm every night. Seven times every remaining

day of your earthly pilgrimage sing a Psalm. Let no place, and no conversation, and no occupation delude you out of your heart-refreshing Psalm. Fill the house of your pilgrimage with the sound of Psalms. Let the prisoners hear you. Let the angels hear you. Let God hear you. Let Him bow down His ear and hear you. And let Him say to His Son, and to His angels, and to His saints, over you and over your house, I have found a man after Mine own heart; with My holy oil have I anointed him.

XXXIX

JONATHAN

*THY LOVE TO ME WAS WONDERFUL,
PASSING THE LOVE OF WOMEN*

ONATHAN was the eldest son of Saul, and he was thus the heir-apparent to the throne of Israel. The crown prince was a young man of great mental gifts, and he was endowed also with many most impressive moral qualities. Handsome and high-mettled, full of nerve and full of heart, Jonathan was the pride of the army and the darling of the common people. His comrades, for his beauty of person and for his swiftness of foot, were wont to call him 'The Gazelle. In all that, the heir-presumptive was the son of his royal father's early and best days. But the piety, the humility, the generosity, the absolutely Christ-like loyalty, tenderness, self-forgetfulness, and self-sacrifice of Jonathan—all that the son had drawn from some far higher source than from his fast-falling father Saul. But for his father's great and disastrous transgressions, Jonathan would soon have been the second king of Israel; second in succession to Saul, but second to no king that ever sat on a throne in those great qualities of mind and heart and character

that give stability to a throne and add lustre to a crown.

The first time that Jonathan and David ever saw one another was on the day when Goliath fell under David's sling. Jonathan had stood beside his father Saul, and had been a spectator of the never-to-be-forgotten scene. Brave and bold and practised in war as Jonathan by that time was, with all that he had not been bold enough to face the gigantic braggart. But, with all the army, with both armies, he had been astounded to see a Bethlehemite stripling, fresh from his father's sheep, step out into the open space to face the champion of the opposing host. And when the five thousand shekels of brass rang on the open plain no voice shouted over David so soon or so long as the voice of Jonathan, the king's son. And when Saul sent for David and talked with him, Jonathan's heart went out to David, and the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved David as his own soul. And from that day on till the day when David sang his splendid elegy over Saul and over Jonathan his son, the mutual love of Jonathan and David is described all along in words of such warmth and such beauty that there is nothing like them in literature again, if we leave out the love of Christ.

‘And it came to pass that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David.’ You knit things together that are of the same kind; things that are of the same substance, and fibre, and texture, and strength, and endurance. You knit a thread to a kindred thread. You knit a cord to a kindred cord.

You knit a three-fold cord to a three-fold cord. You knit a chain of iron to a chain of iron; a chain of brass to a chain of brass; a chain of gold to a chain of gold; and a chain of gold of the same size, and strength, and purity, and beauty to a chain of gold of the same size, and strength, and purity, and beauty. Now Jonathan's soul was a chain of gold, of the same size, and strength, and purity, and beauty as David's soul. Jonathan, as being the elder man, had for long been looking and longing for a soul like David's soul to which his own soul might be knit; and before the sun set that day the son of Saul had found in the son of Jesse a soul after his own soul, and he was at rest. Jonathan's soul was that day knit to another soul, if possible, still more tender, and pure, and pious, and noble, and loyal than his own; till Jonathan was the happiest man in all Israel that day. And that pattern of friendship, knit that day between Jonathan and David, has been the ensample and the seal of all true friendships among men ever since. It was a sweet fancy of Plato that at the great aboriginal creation of human souls they all came from the hand of the God of power, and wisdom, and love, and holiness twain in one. All human souls came into existence already knit together like the souls of Adam and Eve, like the souls of David and Jonathan, like the souls of Jesus and John, like the souls of Christ and His church. But Sin, the great sunderer and separator and scatterer of souls, came in and cleft asunder soul-consort from soul-consort till all our souls since the fall start this lonely life alone. And all the

longings, and cravings, and yearnings, and hungerings, and thirstings, and faintings, and failings that fill the souls of men and women—it is all in search of that brother-soul, that sister-soul, that spousal-soul that we have all loved long since and lost a while. And every true comradeship, every true courtship, every true espousalship, every true married life is the divine recovery and reunion of twin-soul to twin-soul, as all human souls were in the great beginning, and will for ever be in God and in God's house of love and rest and satisfaction. And had Plato read Hebrew, how he would have hailed Jonathan and David as another example of two long-lost and disconsolate souls, finding rest in their primogenial, spousal, re-knit, and never-again-to-be-separated soul.

‘And Jonathan loved David as his own soul.’ Had I read this for this once only, I would have passed over it as a permissible hyperbole in the sacred writer. But when I read again and again and again that Jonathan loved David as his own soul, till I come down to David's splendid hyperbolical elegy over the slaughter of Saul and Jonathan; and then, when I go back and read Jonathan's whole dealing with David in the light of that golden chain of hyperboles, I stop, and think, and say to myself that there must be much more here than stands on the surface. Till I find myself saying to this sacred writer, Lo, in all this speakest thou plainly, and speakest no hyperbole. Yes; happy, happy Jonathan! For it was not of thee that David spake in that bitter psalm. ‘Yea, mine own

familiar friend,' David said, but not of thee, 'in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.' Nor was it of thee in another still more bitter psalm, 'But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company. The words of his mouth were sweeter than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords.' No, happy Jonathan, it was not of thee. Nor was this of thee, 'Thou didst speak peace to thy neighbour, while mischief was in thy heart.' Nor this, 'Thou didst bless with thy mouth, whilst thou didst curse inwardly.' Thy tongue, saintly man, did not frame deceit. Thou didst not sit and speak against thy brother. Jeremiah never said of thee in the bitterness of his heart that he heard the defaming of many. Thou never saidest concerning the friendless prophet, Report, and I will report it. He excepted thee when he upbraided them all round, and said, All my familiars watch for my halting. Nor did David's Son after thou hadst kissed Him say to thee, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Nor did Hamlet ever say to thee, 'O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain! My tables—meet it is I set it down, that one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.' Thy sin never found thee out. Thou never knewest the plague of a villain's heart. Thou never criedst, Create in me a clean heart, O Lord! Isaiah said, but thou never needest to say, I am a man of unclean lips. Great Jonathan!

Dear Jonathan ! We kiss thy feet. Till thy great Antitype comes we shall see no man born of woman again like thee !

‘Then Jonathan and David made a covenant because he loved him as his own soul.’ Jonathan’s love was like the love of women in this, that it led Jonathan to leave his father’s house behind him and to give his hand and his heart in a covenant to David. A woman cannot find rest but in the house of her husband. Knit as her heart is, and will for ever be, to her father and to her mother, yet there is a soul somewhere in God’s hand to whom she was knit before she was born, and when God opens His hand twin-soul leaps out to meet twin-soul, and she is married in the Lord. Now, it was something like that. David, in the warmth of his heart and in the sharpness of his sorrow, said that the love of Jonathan to him was still more wonderful than that. No love can be more wonderful than the love of a woman when she loves in God ; when the warmth, and the tenderness, and the faithfulness, and the endurance, and the self-sacrifice of nature is all deepened, and strengthened, and ennobled, and made everlasting in the transforming and transcending love of God. And it was because Jonathan’s love had so much of a woman’s love in it ; and, added to that, so much of God’s love, that David’s rapture rose to such a sublime height over it. There was something in Jonathan’s love that David had never met with in any of the women whose love he had ever been blessed with, Abigail’s, or Michal’s, or Solomon’s

mother's love, or any love his fathers had told him of in their days. And the surpassing love of Jonathan stood so alone because it stood so in God. Jonathan's heart had for long been full of God, and God is love. Under Samuel's ministry, Jonathan's heart had early been knit to God, and thus it was that his heart so knit itself round David's heart, in whom he found a man after God's own heart. And thus it was that father, and mother, and crown of Israel, and all, were counted loss to Jonathan as soon as he found David who had been so found of God. You will see the same thing to some extent in your own house every day. True religion, the knowledge and the love of God in your child's heart, will compel him to seek friends outside of your door if you are without the knowledge and the love of your son's God. How happy is that son who can love and honour and open all his heart to his father and mother in the Lord! But how unhappy if not! Jonathan loved Saul his father with a noble, devoted, loyal, and truly filial love. He followed his father's falling fortunes till father and son and all fell at last in the field. But all the time Saul had a son at his side whose deep and pure and holy heart he could neither understand, nor value, nor satisfy. Saul had begotten a son in Jonathan who was as much greater and better than himself as heaven is greater and better than earth; I might almost say than hell. Jonathan made a covenant with David, and with the house of David; and in making that covenant, and in the very terms of it, Jonathan, as

we see in the Scriptures of it, spake less to David than he spake to David's God, the Lord God of Israel.

‘And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.’ A wife's marriage ring is the seal of her husband's covenant with her, and her covenant with him. The rainbow in heaven is the seal of God's covenant with Noah, and with the earth. The water is the seal of God's covenant in baptism; and the bread and the wine in the supper. And, in like manner, Jonathan's robe, and his garments, and his sword, and his bow, and his girdle, were the signs and the seals of Jonathan's covenant that he made that day with David. In the bread and in the wine, Christ and all the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers. And in Jonathan's robe, and raiment, and sword, and bow, and girdle, the kingdom of Israel, and all its honour and power and glory, were represented and sealed to David by this extraordinary action of Jonathan. The son and heir of Saul stripped himself naked for the sake of his sworn friend. Jonathan was such a miraculous and sacramental friend to David, that he stripped himself bare in order to clothe, and adorn, and seal David to the throne of Israel. In his measure, and so far as was in his power, Jonathan did that day all that Jesus Christ did in the fulness of time. Jonathan was only the sinful son of a sinful father, whereas Jesus Christ was the Son of God. But nothing more is said even of the Son of God Himself in this re-

spect, than that He stripped Himself bare for His enemies, and clothed them with His robe and with His diadem. Well, all that Jonathan does to David. Jonathan is a disciple of Jesus Christ, born out of due time. Jonathan is all but Jesus Christ Himself come already in the Old Testament. As Jonathan strips himself to the bone, you look at him doing it and you exclaim, How could he ever do it! My brethren, your amazed exclamation betrays you. It is natural to you, and it shows to all who hear you that you have not yet begun to strip yourself for friend or enemy. If you had, if you had once even begun so to strip yourself, you would not cry out in such astonishment how Jonathan could do it. If you knew it, how could he help doing it? How could he do anything else? How could he stop doing it, till it was all done? He could not. And neither can you when once you have begun to do it. For the first time you will taste what true life is when you strip yourself bare of your best robe to put it upon your rival: upon him who is coming up so fast to supplant you. And you will drink deeper and deeper of the fountain of life as you go on to strip off your sword, and your bow, and your girdle to put them upon him. Of such is the kingdom of heaven. To such, and to such only, will it be said, Come up hither. Such, and such only, are highly exalted at the last. Such, and such only as make themselves of no reputation now. If you do it as they did it, you will yet sit down beside Jesus Christ and Jonathan, but not otherwise. At no less price to you than to them. But at the same price to you

as to them. And it is for this cause that you have a robe given you, and garments, and a sword, and a bow, and a girdle, and a rival, and a supplanter.

‘And it was told Saul. And Saul sought David every day. And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life. And David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood. And Jonathan, Saul’s son, arose and went to David into the wood, and strengthened David’s hand in God.’ There is a two-edged sword in the French tongue to this effect, that there is something in the misfortunes of our best friends that is not wholly displeasing to our secret hearts. But not to Jonathan’s secret heart. Let every man defend himself from that sword of God as he is best able. Here is Jonathan’s defence and shield, this : ‘And Saul’s son arose and went to David in the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.’ That is Jonathan’s shield against that sharp sword, and the hand of God in His own word holds it up over Jonathan. Be sure you see the full truth and the full beauty of that visit of Jonathan to the wood of Ziph. David was in danger of losing his faith in God. Which, if he had lost, he would have been the coming king of Israel, and Jonathan’s rival, no longer. And Jonathan seeing that, came to the wood of Ziph to strengthen David in God lest his faith should fail. Was there ever a nobler deed done on the face of the earth till the Son of God came to do such deeds, and to show us all the way? If I had been Jonathan, I would have looked to David to strengthen me. I would have insisted that I

needed the sympathy and the strength. It would have been a long time before I would have left my palace in Gibeah to go down to the wood of Ziph to strengthen the hand of my best friend, if that strength was to carry him over my head and put me under his feet. And Jonathan said to David, 'Fear not, for thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee.'

Are any of you being sent at this moment to that school to which God sent Jonathan? Are humiliations, and disappointments, and losses, and defeats your tutors and governors? Then, take Jonathan's history home with you to-night to imitate it. Grudge not your neighbour his divinely ordained promotion or praise. But, rather, as you have opportunity, strengthen his hand in God. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten, and humble, and put down, and make second. But to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame.

He always wins who sides with God,
To him no chance is lost ;
God's will is sweetest to him when
It triumphs at his cost.

The cross of Christ was made of a tree that had grown in the wood of Ziph, and yours will be made of the same shining timber.

XL

N A B A L

THE MAN WAS CHURLISH

WE see Nabal on two occasions only. On the occasion of the sheep-shearing ten days before his marriage, and then on the occasion of the sheep-shearing ten days before his death. Had David been in the wilderness of Paran at that sunny sheep-shearing immediately before Nabal's marriage, and had he asked for the crumbs that fell from the bridegroom's table, David would have been set in the place of honour at the smiling sheep-master's right hand. All that happy time when their master went out to the sheep-folds, he said to the sheep-shearers, 'The Lord be with you. And they answered him, 'The Lord bless thee. The-Joy-of-her-father,—for that was the name of the sheep-master's beautiful bride,—was also the joy of her bridegroom, till he sent two hundred loaves of bread, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs to Adullam, so that every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, ate and drank and said, Let the God

of Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel be the God of that great man in Maon and Abigail his bride. 'The Lord make the woman that is come into his house like Rachel, and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel.' And because of the blessing of all the poor and needy round about, and because of the beauty and the good understanding of Abigail, her husband was the happiest and the most open-handed man that day among all the men in Maon. And the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats, and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

The Bible has a way of its own of taking great leaps sometimes over long spaces of some men's lives. And thus it is that the next time we see Abigail's bridegroom we would not know him. And we are left of the sacred writer to compose the whole married life of Nabal and Abigail out of our own married lives. And the Bible, with great safety and great assurance, leaves us to do that. Because it knows that as face answers to face in water, so do betrothed, and married, and churlish lives in ancient Israel, answer to married and churlish lives among ourselves.

The second sheep-shearing scene is set before us in a chapter of great pictorial power. With quite extraordinary concentration and strength, Nabal and Abigail are made to stand out before us in their great pictorial chapter. Abigail is still a woman of a good understanding. But Matthew Henry says that her understanding was all little enough

for her exercises in it, for the man was churlish and evil in his doings. Abigail to all appearances is the same woman she was at the first sheep-shearing, but her husband has sadly gone down. It was the season of the year when the most churlish of men were wont to melt for the moment into hospitality and self-enjoyment, and even Nabal held a feast in his house. David and his six hundred men were lying in exile in the adjoining wilderness. Persecuted and cast out as David and his men were, they never forgot that they were men of Israel; and up among the mountains, and out on the borders, they were a kind of volunteer protectors and patrolling police over the flocks and herds of men like Nabal. As a matter of fact, David had interposed again and again, and been a wall, as Nabal's shepherds themselves said, round them and their sheep against the sheep-stealing tribes. The starving exiles had looked for some reward for their work; but Nabal was Nabal. Till sheer famine made David send to Nabal's feast and ask a share of his hospitality to 'thy son David,' as he called himself in his courteous but bold message. But Nabal's softness of heart over his sheep-shearing was only skin-deep. 'Who is David,' Nabal snapped out, 'that I should share my feast with him and his vagabonds?' And no sooner did David hear Nabal's churlish and insulting answer than he said, and it was all he said, 'Gird ye on every man his sword.' But, as good providence would have it, Abigail had heard both of David's embassy and of her husband's churlish answer, and she lost not a moment. Sending on before her a

present of meat and drink, she hastened after it, and met David and his four hundred men just in time. How Abigail behaved herself before the insulted and revengeful soldiers; with what tact and understanding she spake to David; and how she melted David and turned away his hot anger—all that we read in the matter and the manner of this sacred writer. And, then, in two verses of crowning strength of style we have Nabal's drunken debauch all night, and his sudden death of fear and hate and hardness of heart in the morning.

‘Nabal was of the house of Caleb.’ But there is a Latin proverb to this effect, that to be the son of a good father is the shame of a bad son. Now, Caleb was a good father. Caleb was a large-hearted, hopeful, God-serving man. And Caleb and his house held their large estates in the land of Israel on that tenure. The family property was a witness to their father's great services in a dark day in Israel. Caleb lived to a green old age, crowned with all the love and honour that Nabal had by this time wholly lost. By his birth Nabal had come into great possessions in Carmel; and, as if to make him a man like his father—as if to keep his heart soft and full of love to God and man,—God had added to all that a wife who shines high up among the household saints of the house of Israel. But, all the time, Caleb and Abigail, great inheritance and great dowry, happy home, and all, there was a ‘stone of obstination’ in Nabal's heart that nothing could melt or remove, till his whole heart was turned to stone and he died.

‘Our master flew at David’s messengers,’ reported the young man to Abigail. ‘He railed on them,’ as we excellently read it in the text. He snarled and snapped at them, as Josephus so graphically has it. You see the man. You know the man. Your young men know the man. Your wife knows the man. Your children know the man. ‘Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master.’ It is a glass, this chapter, in which we all see our churlish selves to the life. Who is he? we demand, with all the contempt and scorn we can call up out of our contemptuous and scornful hearts. Who is he to speak to me and to treat me in that way? And we go on to put the worst construction upon him, and upon his family, and upon his friends. A parcel of vagabonds! snarled out Nabal. And how much of our own speaking and writing about people we do not like is exactly like that churlish outbreak of Nabal. And what mischief Nabal’s tongue and pen work among us also! Nothing roots our wicked hearts deeper into our whole life and character than a snarling tongue or a railing pen let loose. And nothing puts David and his men into a more wicked and murderous temper than to be railed at as Nabal railed. Do not do it. Do not listen to it. Do not read it. It is the death of your heart to speak it and to hear it. When you speak it your conversation is in hell; and when you write or read it, it is the literature of hell. It kindles hell in him who is railed at, and it spreads, and it feeds hell in him

who writes it, or reads it, or speaks it. Nabal's railing tongue kindled such an outburst of murderous hate in David and in his men that, another half hour and it would have been put out in Nabal's blood.

'The man was churlish,' says this shorthand writer, giving us Nabal's whole character in a single word. That is to say, Nabal had allowed and indulged himself in his snarling, snappish ways till he was known in his own house, among his shepherds, and all round about, as Nabal the churl. 'A devil at home' is one of the sure marks of Thomas Shepard's 'evangelical hypocrite. He shines like an angel in the church. Christ and mercy are never out of his mouth. He is much to be heard on closing with Christ. He is raised up to heaven with liberty and joy on Sabbath, and especially on communion days. But he is a devil at home.' Whereas we find that 'hyperbole of sin,' Lancelot Andrewes, on his knees night and day, 'to be kind to mine own.' And you will remember that other portrait of the same family in John Bunyan. Obstinate also gave a great sheep-shearing feast before his marriage. And his bride also led her bridegroom to church and market in a silken bridle—for a time. But time passes, and there passes away with time all the hospitality, humility, pliability, and sweetness of the churlish and obstinate man. It is not that he has ceased to love his wife and his children. It is not that. But there is this in all genuine and inbred churlishness and obstinacy, that, after a time, it comes out worst

beside those we love best. A man will be affable, accessible, entertaining, the best of company, and the very soul of it abroad, and, then, the instant he turns the latch-key in his own door, Nabal himself was not worse, he sinks back into such an utter boorishness, and mulishness, and doggedness. He swallows his meal in silence, and then he sits all night with a cloud on his brow. He is silent to no children but his own; he is a bear to nobody but his own wife. Nothing pleases him; nothing in his own house is to his mind. And all the time it is not that he does not pray to love his own, like Andrewes; but there is a law of obstinacy in his heart that still makes him a devil at home. And then hear Christiana: 'That which troubleth me most is my churlish carriages to my husband when he was in his distress. I am that woman that was so hard-hearted. And so guilt took hold of my mind, and would have drawn me to the pond.' Yes, constant fault-finding; constant correction, and that before strangers; gloomy looks; rough words and manners; all blame and no praise—with these things we are all driving one another to the brink of the pond every day.

'And it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him all these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.' Nabal died of a stone in his heart. Nabal died of pride and rage. Nabal died of a strange disease—indebtedness to his wife. Nabal would rather have died of David's sword than have been saved from

David's sword by the understanding and the interposition and the intercession of his wife. Nabal died rather than admit that he had played the fool through all that sheep-shearing time. Had Nabal kissed Abigail that morning; had he kissed her hand; had he kissed her feet; he would have been living to this day; and when he died like a shock of corn fully ripe, all Israel would have mourned that they had lost him, and David would have sung a psalm over him that we would have put upon the tombstones of all our magnanimous and much-lamented men. As it was, it became a proverb in Israel to ask when a madman, or a man possessed with a devil, or a man who took his own life, died, Died he as Nabal died? Take care, O churlish husband! Take care, O man with a heart of stone beginning in thy bosom. For Satan is fast entering into thee. Take care.

But, now, can such churlishness be cured? Can it really be cured? some of you who have that cruel stone for long spreading in your hearts will ask me. Yes, it can, if it is taken in time, and if it is treated in the right way. And the first thing in the cure is to admit and accept the disease. It is to say, I am Nabal. Had Nabal taken it to heart how it would end, as soon as he felt the tenderness, and the honourableness, and the nobleness, and the manliness of his betrothal and bridegroom days beginning to wear off his heart and his life; had he been man enough, and man of God enough, and husband enough to watch and know the stopping of his heart and the creeping-on coldness of his heart to

God and man, and especially to Abigail ; and had he confessed to himself his fears how all that would end, it would all have ended the entire opposite of how it did end. Had he been thankful also. Had he practised himself in going back upon Caleb and the inheritance he had got because of Caleb ; had he taken his flocks and his herds, and all that he had, every sheep-shearing time, again from the hand of God ; had he every night and every morning taken Abigail in all her understanding and all her beauty again from the hand of God ; and had he prevented David's petition and sent him a share of the sheep-shearing feast before he asked for it—by all that, Nabal would have made himself a new heart, and he would have come down to us in as good a report as any of the elders of Israel. Kick, then, the dog out of your heart. Hammer the stone out of your heart, and you will get back the days of your first sheep-shearing ; you will get back your bride, and your own tender, hopeful, noble, manful heart. But the one, the only real and sure cure for all our New Testament Nabals is that supreme antidote and counter-poison to all churlishness, the cross of Christ. Whatever we start with, we always end with the cross of Christ. Try it, for it cures everything, and especially churlishness and all its bad effects. It cures churlishness in Nabal ; and impatience, and weariness, and despair of life in Abigail ; and anger and revenge in David. Come near to the cross, both Nabal, and David, and Abigail, and look and hear. Hear those churlish men as they pass by and wag their heads, and rail at David's Son cast

out upon the cross from among men, while, all the time, He dies to save and bless them. Great Example! Great Refuge and Great Strength to us all! The Butt, the Jest, the Scoff, the Flout of all who pass by! We come to Thee. We need Thee. We have no cure for our hearts, and no pardon for our hearts but Thee. Churls, and churls' victims, we come to Thee. Railing and railed at, we come to Thee. Nabal, and David, and Abigail, and the shepherds, and the soldiers, we all come to Thee. We hang by our hands and our feet and our hearts beside Thee. We forgive all those who revile us, and buffet us, and despitefully use us beside Thee. We die, and are buried, and rise again, and sit beside Thee. Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous. Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

XLI

MICHAL, SAUL'S DAUGHTER

*SHE DESPISED HIM
IN HER HEART*



EVER, surely, were man and wife more unequally yoked together than was David, the man after God's own heart, with Michal, Saul's daughter. What was David's meat was Michal's poison. What was sweeter than honey to David was gall and wormwood to Michal. The things that had become dearer and dearer to David's heart every day, those were the very things that drove Michal absolutely mad; furiously and ungovernably mad that day on which the ark of God was brought up to the city of David.

It was the greatest day of David's life. And, sad to say, it was the very greatness of the day to David that made it such a day of death to Michal, Saul's daughter. Michal, Saul's daughter, died that day of a strange disease—a deep distaste at the things that were her husband's greatest delight. A deep distaste that had grown to be a deep dislike at David, till that deep distaste and settled dislike burst out that day into downright hatred and deliberate insult. You must understand all that

the ark of God was to David, and the home-bringing of the ark, before you can fully understand the whole catastrophe of that day. It would take me till midnight to tell you all that was in David's heart as he sacrificed oxen and fatlings at six paces, and leaped and danced before the ark of God all the way up to the city of David. And, even then, you would need to be a kind of David yourself before you would look with right reverence and love at David that day. For David was beside himself that day. David never did anything by halves, and least of all his worship of God. It was like that day long afterwards in that same city when we read that His disciples remembered that it was written, *The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up.* With all his might, then—and you know something of what all David's might in such matters was—with all his might David leaped and danced before the Lord till Michal despised him in her heart.

Those who are deaf always despise those who dance. The deaf do not hear the music. And, on the other hand, those who do hear the music, they cannot understand those who can sit still. David could not understand how Michal could sit still that day. But Michal's ear had never been opened to the music of the ark. She had not been brought up to it, and it was not her custom to go up to the house of the Lord to sing and play like David. Had Michal been married in the Lord; had Michal revered her husband; had she cared to please her husband; had she played on the psaltery and harp sometimes, if only for his sake—what a happy

wife Michal would have been, and David what a happy husband! Had her heart been right with her husband's heart when he blessed his household every night; had she been wont with all her heart to unite with her husband when he blessed them every night and sang psalms with them; had she sung with him and said, We will not go up into our bed till we have found out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob: how well it would have been. Lo! sang David alone with the handmaids of his servants, Lo! we heard of it at Ephratah; we found it in the fields of the wood. Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest; Thou and the ark of Thy strength. Had David not been so unequally yoked, Michal would have put on David's shoulder that day an ephod that she had worked for that day with her own hands; and as she put it on him she would have sung and said, I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. And then all that day in Jerusalem it would have been as it was at the Red Sea when Miriam the prophetess took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went after her with timbrels and with dances. But it was not so to be. For Michal sat at home that great day in Israel, and forsook her own mercy. Michal was not in the spirit of that day. And thus it was that she despised David in her heart when the very gates of brass and iron were lifting up their heads at David's psalm to let the King of Glory come in.

Not to speak of the past, had Michal done that day what any woman with any sense of decency left

in her would have done—had she put on her royal garments and set out with David to the house of Obed-Edom, how differently for her and for David that day would have ended! For, once on the ground; once surrounded with the assembled people, the magnificent scene would have carried Michal away. The fast-dying ashes of her first love for David would have been blown up into all their former flame as she shared in the splendid salutation that David received from the assembled land. No ambitious woman, and least of all Saul's royal-hearted daughter, could have seen assembled Israel that day without being swept into sympathy with the scene. But Michal lost her last opportunity that morning. Michal did not overcome herself that morning. Her proud and unsympathetic temper got the better of her that morning, till David had to set out on the royal duties of that day alone. And as the day went on, Michal was left alone with a heart the most miserable in all Israel that day. And Michal's heart became harder and darker and fiercer as the day went on. Harder and darker and fiercer at David, and at all the ordinances and delights of that day. And then, when all Jerusalem rang with the ark just at her door, Michal stole to her shut window and saw nothing but David dancing before the Lord. At the despicable sight she spat at him, and sank back in her seat with all hell in her heart. You have had Michal's heart in yourselves, in your measure, on some Sabbath-day when you remained at home for some wrong reason, and when your husband

came home with his face shining. And on other days, when you should have been at his side, but some distaste, some dislike, some pique, some catishness kept you at home to eat your heart all the time. And then the very high spirits of the party when they came home made your day end sufficiently like Michal's day. What a pity that David did not better prevail with Michal to accompany him to the fields of the wood that day!

The wife see that she reverence her husband, says the apostle. Yes; but even Paul himself would have allowed that it was impossible for Michal to reverence David all at once that day. Paul would have needed to have got Michal's ear early that morning when she tarried at home in the palace. Nay, he would have needed to have got her heart while she was yet Saul's daughter in Saul's palace. It is to tell a waterfall to flow uphill to tell Michal at this time of day to reverence David. Reverence does not come even at a divine command. Reverence does not spring up in a day. Reverence is the result of long teaching and long training. Reverence has its roots in the heart and in the character; and the heart and the character only come and bring forth reverence as life goes on. That may be all true, but the apostle does not say that. He does not say that any of the wives to whom he wrote were too late now to reverence their husbands. He speaks it to all wives, and he expects that all wives who hear it shall lay it to heart, and shall do it. And yet their husbands, their very best husbands, are in so many things so difficult, so impossible, to

reverence. They fall so far short of their young wife's dreams and visions. They are so full of faults, and follies, and tempers, and habits to which no wife can possibly be blind. Most husbands are at so little trouble, after they have been for some time husbands, to make it easy, or indeed possible, for their wives to continue to love, and respect, and reverence them. All our wives have dreary, lonely, sorely disappointed days at home—partly our fault and partly theirs, but mostly ours—that we know nothing about. Now, what are they to do between Paul on the one hand demanding in the name of God that they shall love and reverence us, and us on the other hand with all our might making both love and reverence impossible? Well, with God all things are possible. Let our wives, then, take us, with all our faults and infirmities, and let them think that with all our faults and infirmities we are still their husbands.

And let them take this to heart also, that though we fall ever so far below ourselves, that is all the more reason why they should rise all the more above themselves. It does not divorce a wife from her affection and respect for her husband that he causes her much pain and shame: many a blush in public, and many a tear in private. His sins against good taste, his clownish or churlish habits, his tempers, his prejudices, his ignorance, his rude, insolent, overbearing ways, not to speak of still grosser vices—all that will not absolve a wife from a wife's solicitude and goodwill to her husband. All that will not discharge her from her command over her-

self. She must often see and feel all that like a wolf under her gown as she sits at the top of the table and her husband sits at the foot. But she must all the more learn to say her own grace to herself before she sits down to her temptation, till she is able to return thanks as she rises to go upstairs. All the time they are talking and eating and drinking at the other end of the table, she must set a watch on her ears and on her eyes and on the blood in her cheeks. She must be as full of guile as her husband is of meat and drink and himself. The keenest and cruelest eye must not find her out. Its deceived owner must be sent home saying, What a fool of a wife that brute, that bore, that goose has! I declare the blind thing is still in love with him! The wife see that she is hypocrite enough to throw dust into the eyes of her oldest, closest, and most familiar friend. Dante describes Michal as a woman who stood scornful and afflicted at her royal window. But let not even Dante's terrible eyes see either your scorn of your husband or your affliction on account of his exposure of himself. Throw dust even into Dante's blazing eyes. We are poor creatures, the best of us husbands; and, at our best, we are still full of appetites and egotisms and all the other dregs of our indwelling sin. But if Almighty God bears with us, and does not despise us and spurn us and refuse us His love, neither will you. And you will be well paid for it all, and well acknowledged. For when we praise God at last, and say, To Him who loved us! we will not forget you. The wife see, then,

that she prays for and puts up with her husband. The wife see that she makes his self-improvement easy for her husband. And if, after all is done, there is an irreducible residuum of distaste, and almost dislike left, well, all the more let her see to it that she work out his and her own salvation under that secret, life-long, household cross. To your thorn, as to the apostle's, Christ will come and will say, My grace is sufficient for it. My strength is made perfect even in such weakness as yours.

Being the woman she was, and having the husband she had, Michal could not but feel both scorn and affliction that day. But, when all is said for her, and all allowance made, she should not have spoken to David as it is recorded she did speak. She could not command her proud heart when she saw David dancing, but by the time he came home she should have had her tongue tamed and under a bridle. David was, no doubt, a great provocation and a constant cross to Michal. They were never made for one another. It was impossible they could ever be happy as man and wife, short of a miracle. David was all emotion, especially in divine things; whereas Michal was as proud and cold as if she had been a daughter of Lucifer, as indeed she was. David that day was like one of our own ministers coming home from the communion table. It takes a night and a day and more than that till the agitation and the emotion of a communion day subsides and settles in a minister's heart. And if he were met with a blow in the face about his sermon or his prayer or his table service as he opened his own

door, that was exactly the reception that poor David met with at Michal's hands that day. The wife see, at any rate, that she holds her tongue. I do not now speak of communion time. There is no fear of any minister's wife speaking on that day as Michal spoke. But there are other times with ministers and with all men. Times when husband and wife do not see eye to eye. Times when their two hearts do not beat as one heart. Times of distaste, and disapproval, and difference of opinion, and positive dislike; when Michal, who is written for our learning, must be called to every wife's mind. Michal with her heart full of war, and her mouth full of wicked words, and her whole after-life full of remorse and misery for that evil day in her house in Jerusalem—Michal is a divine looking-glass for all angry and outspoken wives.

'It was before the Lord,' was David's noble answer to Michal's taunting and insulting words. That was the whole explanation of David's emotion and the sufficient justification of it. David's overflowing joy that day had its deep and full spring in that far-off but never-to-be-forgotten day when Samuel came to Bethlehem with his horn of oil. To understand David and to sing David's psalms, you must have come through David's experiences. You must have had David's birth and upbringing; David's election and anointing and call; David's sins and David's salvation; David's falls and David's restorations; David's offices and David's services in the church of God. No wonder, then, that so many of David's psalms are as much beyond your depth

to-day as his dancing was beyond Michal's depth that day. Michal thought of her royal father Saul that day, and despised David. David thought of his poor father Jesse that day, and danced before the Lord. And, as he says, he would have danced all the same, and still more, had earth and hell both been all let loose to scoff and scout at him. 'Both less and more than king,' is Dante's whole remark on David's dance. As we shall be on that day when we look down at the hole of the pit from whence we were digged, and cast our crowns at His feet who took us from the dung-hill and set us beside David.

And then, the truly noble, the truly humble, and the terribly lonely man that he was, David took up the taunt of his godless and heartless wife, and wore it as a badge of honour before the Lord that day. Yes, he said, it will be as you say. I will seek and I will find among the poorest and the most despised of God's people that which my own married wife denies me at home. And who can tell how many husbands here are in David's desolate case? Who can tell how many have to go out of their own homes to find the finest sympathy, and the fullest utterance, and the completest rest for their hearts? The wife see that her husband has not to go abroad to find his best friend, his most sympathetic and fellow-feeling friend, and, above all, in his religion. A minister once told me that he preached best and prayed best when his wife was at home. What a gulf there was between David and Michal; between Jesus and His brethren,

not to say His mother ; and between my desolate friend and his wife ! My brethren, the Holy Ghost knew what He was doing, and for whom He was doing it, when He moved the sacred writer to put that day in David's life into our Bible. And this, — 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it.' And this, — 'And the wife see that she reverence her husband.'

XLII

SOLOMON

*LEST I MYSELF SHOULD
BE A CASTAWAY*



THE shipwreck of Solomon is surely the most terrible tragedy in all the world. For if ever there was a shining type of Christ in the Old Testament church, it was Solomon. If ever any one was once enlightened, and had tasted the heavenly gift, and was made a partaker of the Holy Ghost, and had tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, it was Solomon. If ever any young saint sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and had all these things added unto him, it was Solomon. If the kingdom of heaven was ever like a lord's servant with five talents, who went and traded with the same and made them other five talents, it was Solomon. If ever there was any one of whom it could be said that he had attained, and was already perfect, it was Solomon. If ever ship set sail on a sunny morning, but all that was left of her was a board or two on the shore that night, that ship was Solomon. A board or two of rare and precious wood, indeed; and some of them richly worked and overlaid with silver

and gold—it was Solomon with his sermons, and his prayers, and his proverbs, and his songs, and his temple. If ever a blazing lighthouse was set up in the sea of life to warn every man and to teach every man, it was Solomon.

Solomon was born of a father and a mother, the knowledge of which was enough to sanctify and dedicate both him and them from his mother's womb. If ever it was said over any child's birth, Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, it was surely over the birth, and the birth-gifts and graces of Solomon. If ever a father's and a mother's son said when he was come to years, And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? that son come to years was surely Solomon. And, then, with a tutor and governor like Nathan—Judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? And then his father's deathbed, and all those terrible tragedies on the back of that; all ending in Solomon sitting down on the throne of Israel amid such a blaze of glory. Solomon would have been made of stone not to have been moved to make those vows, and promises, and choices of wisdom and truth and righteousness, which we read so beautifully that he did make at the beginning of his reign in Jerusalem.

The Holy Child Himself never dreamed a better dream than that dream was which Solomon dreamed after that day of a thousand burnt-offerings on the altar of Gibeon. And a nobler choice was never made by any elect man in his most waking and

most enlightened hours, than was the choice that Solomon made that midnight in his sleep. As soon as Lord Melbourne had announced to the young Princess Victoria that she was now Queen of England, he opened the Bible and read to the young sovereign the story of Solomon's dream at Gibeon. It was a stroke of genius. It was an inspiration. It was a prophetic Scripture in her case and in ours. Would God it had come half as true in his case who dreamed the dream! 'And the speech pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment. Behold, I have done according to thy words; lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any one arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.' And both the riches and the honour promised at Gibeon were all fulfilled in Jerusalem, till the half had not been told to Solomon.

Magnifical, a mountain of cedar and wrought gold, as Solomon's temple was, it is all gone to dust and ashes millenniums ago. As the Lord warned Solomon, the temple soon became an astonishment and a hissing. But the dedication prayer that Solomon offered on the opening day before the

altar is a far better prayer to us to-day than it was that day on which it first fell from Solomon's lips. Stone and timber, gold and silver, crumble to dust and are forgotten. But once a piece like that is composed, and spoken, and taken down, and read, it lasts for ever. No doubt it may be said in suspicion and in depreciation of Solomon that kings are wont to get their speeches and their prayers written for them by their ministers, secular and sacred; and that what falls from a king's lips before his people need not have come from his heart. But in the case of a king of Solomon's birth and upbringing and great gifts, such a libel would never have been let light had it not been that it is a real relief to hear it. If Solomon actually, and all of himself, made and offered that wonderful prayer, then when we think of it, he is more a mystery of perdition to us than ever. That wonderful discovery and operation of our day which is called Biblical Criticism has let in a most piercing and searching and edifying light, not only upon Bible books, but also upon Bible men. And upon no man more than upon both Solomon and his books. 'The prayer of Solomon,' says a scholar of no less grace and genius than of scholarship, 'so fully reproduced, and so evidently precomposed, may well have been written under Nathan's guidance.' He does not say positively that it was so precomposed and written. But he evidently believes, for his part, that it was; and he says what he does say in this matter for the sake of those who will let him say it, and not for those who will not. Had

Solomon lived up to that prayer; no, I must not say that, for no man could do that, not Nathan himself; but if Solomon in all his unspeakable sensualities and idolatries had ever given the least sign or symptom that he felt shame for his life, or remorse when he remembered his prayer: had it not been for that, I, for one, could never have let it light on my mind that any one but Solomon himself composed what is here called Solomon's prayer. But I must say it is both a relief and an edification to my mind that the greatest castaway in the Bible may not have been the original and real and only author of one of the greatest and best prayers in the Bible. I can hold up my head better when I am opening a church and am reading and expounding this prayer, when I think of Nathan's pure and noble soul rather than of Solomon, who is so soon to be such a scandal and reprobation. I do not know how you feel about a matter like that. But I shall always return to that splendid prayer with the author of the parable of the one little ewe lamb before my mind, rather than the reprobate lover of no end of strange women, and the fatal father of Rehoboam. I can imagine many open-minded young men here, and many open-minded old men like Jonathan Edwards, who will go back to the prophetic precomposition and the prophetic reproduction of this great prayer with thankfulness to God for the splendid service that Christian scholarship is doing to Holy Scriptures, and not least to Solomon's psalms and songs and prayers and proverbs in our open-eyed, believing, and truly reverential day.

Our own Lord Bacon always comes to my mind when I think about Solomon. For Bacon also took all wisdom and all knowledge, past, present, and yet to be discovered, for his province. Bacon also spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall. He spake also of beasts, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes. Bacon, like Solomon, put tongues into trees and made them speak proverbs. The streams round Verulam and Gorhambury ran excellent books to Bacon, till he extracted wisdom absolutely out of everything. Solomon's House in *The New Atlantis* is the best commentary that will ever be written on the wisdom of Solomon. Bacon's Essays are our English Book of Proverbs, and an English Ecclesiastes could easily be collected out of Bacon's Letters and Speeches. For he, too—

he felt from time to time
The littleness that clings to what is human,
And suffered from the shame of having felt it.

And then, with it all, Bacon's superb genius followed by his awful fall, makes us almost believe that Solomon has come back to this earth again in the lord chancellor of England. Only, how happy it would have made us had Nathan found among Solomon's parchments, and in Solomon's own handwriting, a psalm or prayer like that which Bacon's executors found in his dead desk. Will you join me in the following petitions out of Bacon's prostrate prayer: 'Most gracious Lord God, my merciful Father from my youth up, my Creator, my

Redeemer, my Comforter. Thou, O Lord, soundest and searchest the depths and secrets of all hearts. Thou acknowledgest the upright in heart, Thou judgest the hypocrite, Thou ponderest men's thoughts and doings as in a balance, Thou measurest their intentions as with a line, vanity and crooked ways cannot be hidden from Thee. Lord, I have loved Thy assemblies. I have mourned for the divisions of Thy church. I have delighted in the brightness of Thy sanctuary. Thy creatures have been my books, but Thy Scriptures much more. I have sought Thee in the courts, in the fields, and in the gardens, but I have found Thee in Thy temples. Thousands have been my sins, and ten thousand my transgressions; but Thy sanctifications have remained with me, and my heart, through Thy grace, hath been an unquenched coal upon Thy altar. As Thy favours have increased upon me, so have Thy corrections; so as Thou hast been always near me, O Lord, and ever as my worldly blessings were exalted, so secret darts from Thee have pierced me; and when I have ascended before men, I have descended in humiliation before Thee. Besides my innumerable sins, I confess before Thee that I am debtor to Thee for the gracious talent of Thy gifts and graces, which I have neither put into a napkin nor put it as I ought to exchangers, but have mis-spent it in things for which I was least fit, so as I may truly say my soul hath been a stranger in the house of my pilgrimage. Be merciful unto me, O Lord, and guide me in Thy ways, and afterwards receive me to

glory.' No. That is not Solomon come back again. Would God it were! Solomon has nothing like that to come back with. That is Solomon's father come back to fallen Bacon. That is the man after God's own heart.

What malice there must be in our hearts when God's very best gifts to us, and our very best blessings, are turned by us to be our temptation and our snare! David's terrible fall took place not among the cruel rocks of his exile, but on the roof of the king's palace in Jerusalem. And it was Solomon's very wisdom and wide understanding; it was his great riches; it was his wide dominion; it was his largeness of heart and his long and peaceful life that all worked together to make his path so slippery and so deadly. It is not to be wiser than what is written to say that it was not a vulgar and an everyday sensuality that made Solomon in the end such a castaway. There was that in it. But there were more things, and more seductive and dangerous things in it than that. There was this: There was what the inspired text calls largeness of heart—very much what we would call in our day openness and breadth of mind, hospitality and catholicity of mind, even to sympathy and symbolism with beliefs, with ways of worship, and with ways of no worship, against which it had been the divine call and whole ministry of Moses, and Aaron, and Joshua, and David to warn and to protect the children of Israel. That Solomon should go down to Egypt, of all places on the face of the earth, for his queen; that Pharaoh's daughter should sit on

the throne of David, that must have given a shock to the more conservative, and sober, and thoughtful, and religious, and far-seeing minds in Israel—a shock that we wonder we do not hear more about it while Solomon is yet young and yet alive. We shall hear plenty about it when he is dead, and when Rehoboam's teeth are set on edge. No doubt, largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore, and breadth and openness of mind, and a catholic and a hospitable temper, and the charity that believeth all things and hopeth all things, is all of God, and is all to be seen in Jesus Christ and in His church. At the same time, such is the malignity of our hearts, that even charity itself has its temptations and its snares when it becomes our charity. Even grace itself, says Shepard, is flesh in respect of God. And Solomon's largeness of heart soon ended in sheer flesh itself. His wisdom as his life went on descended not from above. The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable. We see it every day. We see men absolutely revolting against all smallness of heart. They loath all your bigotry, and narrowness, and hardness, and suspicion, and superstition. They see a soul of good especially in things evil. They fraternise with men and with movements that their fathers abominated. They pare down and prune away the decalogue, and the creed, and the catechism, and the books of discipline of their godly upbringing. They rehabilitate and reinvest names and reputations that were a shame and a reproach in their father's house. They go down to Egypt for a wife,

and they bring up her false gods with her. 'And it came to pass that, when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.' And, if not in them, then in their children, all that Moses, and Aaron, and Joshua, and David had won for them and for their children at a great price is surrendered up and sold for naught, till the old great price has to be paid for it again in their children's sin, and suffering, and defeat, and captivity. Every generation has its own sword sent to it: its own peculiar trial of faith and holiness and severe obedience. And there is no shipwreck of faith and holiness and severe obedience in all the world that is written more for the men of our generation than just the terrible shipwreck of Solomon amid his wealth, and his wisdom, and his largeness of horizon and hospitality of heart, even to strange women and to their strange gods, till that end came which always comes.

The books of Solomon so-called—the Proverbs, the Ecclesiastes, and the Song—had a great struggle to get a footing inside the Old Testament. Each one of Solomon's books had its own difficulty to those who sifted out and sealed up the Hebrew Bible. There was something in all the books that were in any way associated with Solomon's name that made the Hebrew Fathers doubt their fitness for a place in Holy Scripture. There is one fatal want in them all. There is no repentance anywhere in Solomon. There is no paschal lamb, or young

pigeon, or bitter herb among all the beasts, and birds, and hyssop-plants of which Solomon spoke and sang so much. There is no day of atonement, or so much as one of the many ordained sacrifices for sin, in any of Solomon's real or imputed writings. Both the sense of truth and the instinct of verisimilitude kept back all those who ever assumed Solomon's name from ever putting a penitential psalm, or a proverb of true repentance, in Solomon's mouth. The historical sense, as we call it, was already too strong for that even in the deathbed moralisings and soliloquisings that have come down to us under Solomon's name. There is no thirty-second, or fifty-first, or hundred and thirtieth Psalm of David in all the volume of 'Psalms of Solomon' that were composed in the century before Christ. No; there is no real repentance, real or assumed, anywhere in Solomon. There is remorse in plenty, and weariness of life, and discontent, and disgust, and self-contempt, bitterer to drink than blood. There is plenty of the sorrow that worketh death; but there is not one syllable of the repentance to salvation not to be repented of. 'All taste for pleasure is extinguished in the king's heart,' wrote Madame de Maintenon from the deathbed of Louis the Fourteenth. 'Old age and disappointment have taught him to make serious reflections on the vanity of everything he was formerly fond of.' Bathsheba might have written that letter from her dying son's bedside. Vanity of vanities, groaned out Solomon, with his heart full of the ashes of a lost life. All is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Dreams at Gibeon, building of temples and kings' houses, largeness of heart, gifts of prophecy, a tongue of men and angels, proverbs and songs and Songs of songs—all is vanity if there is not along with it all constant repentance, daily self-denial, and a heart more and more perfect with God. The wise men of the east, wiser than Solomon, have a proverb upon the secret worm that was gnawing all the time in the royal staff upon which Solomon leaned. What, to end with, is the secret worm that is gnawing in your staff on which you lean?

XLIII

SOLOMON, AND A GREATER THAN
SOLOMON*BEHOLD, A GREATER THAN
SOLOMON IS HERE*

WE have, as I believe, a suddenly passing, but a true and a deep glimpse into the working of our Lord's mind when He says, 'Behold, a greater than Solomon is here.' And there is nothing in heaven or in earth, in God or in man, so interesting to us as the working of our Lord's mind; especially when His mind is working upon Himself. Well, as it appears to me, we have here an example of how our Lord read, and thought, and saw, and felt about Himself, till He had fully discovered Himself, and had fully and for ever taken possession of Himself. The apostle says that it is not wise in us too much to measure ourselves by ourselves, or to compare ourselves with ourselves. But He who is the Wisdom of God itself here measures and compares Himself with Solomon, and that, to us, in a most intensely interesting and instructive way. As the Holy Child read the story of Solomon, as that so beautiful and so tragical story is still told in the First Book of the Kings—as He read and saw how Solomon was born of David and Bathsheba;

how he was named first the Divine Darling, and then the Son of Peace: how the young king chose wisdom and understanding as his royal portion; how wise he already was, and how wise he became, above all the wise men of the East; what a great kingdom he had, and what untold wealth, and what far and near renown he had; what a service he did in building and furnishing the House of the Lord; how the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem to hear his wisdom; and then, after all that, Solomon's songs and sermons and proverbs—as the Child Jesus read all that, and asked questions about all that; and then, when He became a man, and saw Himself as in a glass in all that,—ere ever He was aware, the Holy Ghost had witnessed it and had sealed it on His mind and on His heart, that, in all that He, the Son of Mary, was made of God a far greater than Solomon. The same thing must have come to Him as He read, and prayed, and pondered about David, and Moses, and Abraham, and Adam, till our Lord stood alone among all men, and above all men, and till of the people there was none with Him. And this went on, and increased in all clearness and in all assurance, till He was enabled and constrained to say, I and My Father are One. In some such way as that, as I believe, our Lord was led up of the Spirit from strength to strength, till He stood before God and Man the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God, and the Saviour of all them that believe.

Let us, then, if so be it may be given to us, follow out some of the steps that our Lord took in His own mind till He was able to say to the Scribes

and Pharisees who would see a sign from Him, 'Behold, a greater than Solomon is here.' They were all at one as to Solomon's extraordinary greatness in the matter of his birth. Now, though our Lord was not born at once in David's house, He was born none the less in David's line ; so much so, that there was no name by which He was oftener named, and no name He was more ready to answer to, than just the name, Son of David. The Syro-phœnician woman came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David, the two blind men sitting by the wayside cried, and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him. Blind Bartimæus also : Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And after a short conversation he also received his sight and followed Jesus in the way. Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna in the highest, the multitude cried, singing at His last entry into Jerusalem. Now, Solomon in all his glory never went beyond that. Israel had no nobler salutation for any of her kings than to call him the Son of David. But our Lord was both Son of David and Son of God. It is on those two strong foundation-stones that Paul builds his Epistle to the Romans. 'Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power.' No wonder that Isaiah, who foresaw His glory, said that His name would be called Wonderful ! To be

at once begotten of God from everlasting, and to be born of Mary in the fulness of time; and to be, and to continue to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever, how wonderful is that! Yes; truly, it is far less than the truth to say that a far greater than Solomon is born here.

The exquisitely-told story of Solomon's choice leads us to think of the many untold dreams and visions that must have come to the Holy Child Jesus, and of the many sleeping and waking choices He must have made both before and after His first visit to Solomon's temple. It was after Solomon had offered sacrifices on the altar at Gibeon that the Lord appeared to him and said, Ask what I shall give thee. And we may well believe, that after Jesus at twelve years old saw Jerusalem and the temple and the passover for the first time, a dream would come to Him that night through the multitude of that day's business; a dream, and a voice, and a choice, and a benediction that would all send Him home to Joseph and Mary saying, Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business? And then, what with dreams, and visions, and temptations, and trials, and right choices, and victories day and night untold, our Lord came forth to begin His Messianic life in Israel, as much greater than Solomon as heaven is greater than earth, and as the Son of God is greater than the Son of David. What we know not now about the Mystery of godliness during those eighteen, during those thirty-three years—the most wonderful years this wonderful world has ever seen—it will be our discovery and

delight to know when Wisdom shall have builded her house, and hewn out her seven pillars, and mingled her wine, and furnished her table. 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.'

The second Psalm, the forty-fifth Psalm, the seventy-second Psalm, and the hundred and twenty-sixth Psalm, all have Solomon's name associated with them in one way or other. But no New Testament man can read those Psalms without this coming up on his mind, that a far greater than Solomon is here also. How completely Solomon has passed out of the second Psalm, and how entirely Jesus Christ has taken possession of it till His enemies be made His footstool. 'Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said to me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.' And the forty-fifth Psalm has been made into action-sermons, into table-services, and into prayers and praises at communion-seasons, till, not once in a thousand, do we ever think for a moment of Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter. It is blasphemy to speak to us about 'Solomon in all his glory' when we see and sing Jesus Christ. 'Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. Hearken,

O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear ; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house ; for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him.' And then The Song. Whatever may be the last word to be said about The Song, the Church of Christ has taken such possession of The Song of Songs for her Husband and for herself that it will be His and hers for ever. The Song of Solomon will be sung like the voice of many waters at the marriage-supper of the Lamb. 'I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and His banner over me was love.'

The Proverbs, also, of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel. 'A wise man will hear, and will increase learning ; . . . to understand a proverb, and the interpretation ; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. . . . Go to the ant, thou sluggard ; consider her ways and be wise ; which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. . . . I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. . . . So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth ; and thy want as an armed man. . . . If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there shall it be.' . . . And again, When the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden ; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken,

or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. . . . All well worth coming from Sheba to Jerusalem to hear such parables as these, and much more as good as these. But those who went out among the vineyards, and the sheepfolds, and in the sowing time, and in the reaping time, and suchlike, in Galilee, and Samaria, and Judea with our Lord, they would be the first to exclaim to themselves, Behold, a greater than Solomon is here also. Solomon, at his best, was of the earth, earthy. Jesus Christ is always the Lord from heaven; and, carrying the kingdom of heaven always in His heart, He saw that kingdom everywhere and in everything—in land and sea and sky. What if earth, said the angel to Adam—

Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein
Each to other like, more than on earth is thought?

But that is just how it is when the Lord of angels takes His disciples out among the things of earth, and points out to them how the kingdom of heaven is like this beast, and that bird; this herb, and that tree; this sower with his seed-basket, and that reaper with his reaping-hook; this enemy sowing tares, and that husbandman sifting with his sieve and winnowing with his winnowing-fan; this woman leavening her meal, and that woman sweeping the house; this lost sheep, and that lost son; this marriage with its five wise and its five foolish virgins, and that great supper where they were compelled to come in. No; never man spake like this man. And all men felt it. ‘And it was at Jerusalem the

feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about Him, and said unto Him, How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. And many believed on Him there.' Yes. An infinitely greater than Solomon stood and spake in parables in Solomon's porch that day.

But it was the wisdom of Solomon that brought the Queen of Sheba to Jerusalem, and it was her visit to Jerusalem to see Solomon, that gave us our present text. The Queen of the South, to her immortal honour, came from the uttermost parts of the earth, as our Lord so picturesquely has it, to see the wisdom of Solomon. Never king nor queen set out on a nobler errand than did she of the South; and, according to the beautiful history, she was not only wholly satisfied with what she saw and heard, but she testified to Solomon and said that the half of what she had seen and heard in Jerusalem had not been told her in Sheba. Now, there is no richer, finer, more beautiful, and more winning word in the whole of the Old Testament than just this same word 'wisdom.' And then, when we pass over into the New Testament, we find Wisdom exalted, and honoured, and glorified, and made one of the many names of Him, than whom, and than whose name, there is none other name

given among men whereby we must be saved. The Solomonic books have some incomparably splendid passages on wisdom ; and if Solomon had fallen, and repented, and risen again, and begun again, till he ended in living up to his own sermons on wisdom, what a glory, both in sacred letters and in a holy life, Solomon's name would have been! 'Wisdom,' says Sir Henry Taylor, one of the wisest writers in the English language, 'is not the same with understanding, talents, capacity, ability, sagacity, sense, or prudence—not the same with any one of these ; neither will all these taken together make it up. Wisdom is that exercise of the reason into which the heart enters—a structure of the understanding rising out of the moral and spiritual nature. It is for this cause that a high order of wisdom, that is a highly intellectual wisdom, is still more rare than a high order of genius. When they reach the very highest order they are one ; for each includes the other, and intellectual greatness is matched with moral strength.' And then this fine essayist goes on to point out how Solomon's great intellectual gifts, coupled as they were in him with such an appetite for enjoyment, together became his shipwreck. And Bishop Butler, as I think, the very wisest of all our English writers, though he does not, like Sir Henry Taylor, name Solomon, he surely had him in his eye when he penned that memorable and alarming passage about those men who go over the theory of wisdom and virtue in their thoughts, talk well, and paint fine pictures of it, till their minds are hardened in a contrary course,

and till they become more and more insensible to all moral considerations. I wish the great preacher had gone on in the Rolls Chapel to a sixteenth sermon on Solomon and his fine pictures of wisdom. But in lieu of Butler let Sir Henry Taylor's *Notes from Life* be read by all men who lack wisdom. Our Lord also made fine pictures of wisdom, and virtue, and the kingdom of heaven; but He was constantly correcting His pictures and counselling His hearers that the true wisdom, and the true kingdom of heaven, stands not in the head, but in the heart; not in light, however immediately it comes from heaven, but in both light and love; not in theories, however brilliant and beautiful, but in practices; and in practices, the humbler, the more obscure and despised, and the more full of crosses and crooks they are, the better they are for the purpose.

Our Lord did not absolutely shut great and gifted men like Solomon in all his glory out of the kingdom of heaven, but He did the next thing to it. For, while admitting that all things are possible with God, at the same time, both His own life and all His preaching went to proclaim that great intellect, with great station, and with great appetite for enjoyment, divine possibility and all, were, and would be, all but absolutely fatal to Solomon, and to all Solomon-like men. A far greater intellect than Solomon's was in our Lord; He was ordained and anointed to a far greater station and seat; and He had the capacity, if not the appetite, for far greater enjoyment. But all that was all balanced in our Lord, and built up into moral character, by

great humility, great submissiveness, great labours, and great love. As I do the will of my Father; as I in everything submit Myself to the will of My Father; and as I thus learn more and more of the will of My Father, both to submit Myself to it and to do it; so do ye, He was constantly teaching. And ye also, like Me, shall both know the doctrine that it is of God, and shall come at last with Me to His heavenly kingdom. Here, then, is wisdom, as John says in the Revelation. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. A greater than Solomon in all his wisdom is indeed here.

And when the Queen of Sheba, so we read, had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, and the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her. Solomon had built two houses—one a house for the Lord and another a house for himself. And what the Queen of Sheba saw we also see to this day in the sixth and seventh chapters; and, at this distance of time and space, as we read them we feel like her about them. But, proud of his house of God as Solomon was, he had grace enough to say that the heaven of heavens could not contain the God of Israel, much less this house that he had built. And as time went on in Israel, it became more and more clear that Solomon's temple, from heaven as it was at that time, became more and more a hindrance, rather than a help, to God dwelling on the earth;

till Christ came in the temple of His body, and till Paul built up beside that temple, and leaning upon it, the similar temple of the believer's body. And then John Howe comes to us in our own day, and in our own tongue, with his *Living Temple*, a piece that Paul would have given orders to read to all the churches. And I promise the student of these things, who will begin with Solomon and go on to John Howe, that he will write to me after he has read it all, and will say, that there is no spirit left in him as he lays down the Plato of the Puritans on *That Notion that a Good Man is a Temple of God*.

But my time has failed me. And all I shall attempt to say more at this time is this, that if the Queen of Sheba was so overpowered as she saw the meat of Solomon's table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, what would she have said had she ever sat down at the Lord's Table? I wonder what she would have said when she went south about the Lord's Table, and the meat upon it, and the sitting of His servants, and the attendance of His ministers, and their apparel, and His cupbearers. No, she would have said, the tenth of that had not been told me. Thy wisdom, O Thou Greater than Solomon, she would have broken forth, and Thy prosperity, far exceedeth all the fame that I had heard. Happy are Thy men, happy are those Thy servants, which stand continually before Thee, and hear Thy wisdom. And blessed be the Lord Thy God which delighted in Thee, to set Thee on the throne of Israel.

XLIV

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

*THE QUEEN OF THE SOUTH SHALL
RISE UP IN THE JUDGMENT WITH
THE MEN OF THIS GENERATION,
AND CONDEMN THEM*



I SHALL take up somewhat high ground with you concerning the Queen of Sheba. For, so far as I have seen, that wonderful woman has never had adequate justice done to her. As I see her, the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem on the very highest of errands. She was moved to undertake her journey by the very strongest and the very loftiest of motives. And she saw and heard and took home in her heart far more than her very highest expectations. And while the sacred writer has told us her story in his very best manner, at the same time, it is our Lord's acknowledgment and confession of her in the judgment—it is this that lifts her up in my eyes till I see her among the foremost of those who shall come from the east, and the west, and the north, and the south, and who shall hear the wisdom, and taste the grace, and share the glory of a greater than Solomon in the Jerusalem which is above, and which is the mother of us all.

The first thing that is told us concerning the

Queen of Sheba is this, that she had heard in Sheba concerning the Name of the Lord. It may very well be that this has bribed my eyes and perverted my judgment in the matter of the Queen of Sheba. The Name of the Lord so construes and so glorifies the whole of the Old Testament to me that the more I read the Old Testament the more I find nothing else in it worth its ink but the Name of the Lord. If I once find the Name of the Lord in the life of any Old Testament man or woman, I can never again forget that man or that woman. And, on the other hand, however great, and good, and wise, and famous any man is, if the Name of the Lord is not his strong tower, I fear I do not do that man full justice. If this sacred writer means nothing more by it but a sonorous and a stately turn of expression when he mentions the Name of the Lord as the motive of the Queen of Sheba's mission to Jerusalem; if he means as little by it as the run of the commentators say that he means, then, all I can say is that he has set a trap for my feet in the text. You all know the Name of the Lord, and I hope you all feel about that Name with me. You remember it, and never an hour of any day can you forget it. The Name of the Lord is written all over Moses and David and Isaiah in letters of gold, a finger deep. For the Name of the Lord is 'The LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.'

Well, it had all come about under the good hand of God somewhat in this way. It simply must have

all come about somewhat in this way. Some of those merchantmen who went down to the Red Sea in ships, and did business for Solomon all along its shores in gold, and silver, and ivory, and apes, and peacocks, and almug-trees, and what not, one of their ships on one occasion was driven in for want of fresh water near the summer palace of the Queen of Sheba. And as the seamen of Israel filled their water-pots, it was an ordinance that they should sing, saying, Spring up, O well ; in the Name of the Lord, spring up ! When, who should pass by but the Queen of Sheba herself with her maidens with her ? Sing still another of the songs of Zion, she said to Solomon's sailors. At which they sang a psalm that a prophet who was in their ship had taught them to sing on the occasion of a great tempest they had just passed through. 'These see,' they sang, 'the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths ; their soul is melted because of trouble. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses. Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men !' And, then, at the Name of the Lord, and without being told to do it, all the seamen standing on the shore lifted up their hands to heaven and proclaimed the Name of the Lord, and worshipped, saying, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious.' And ever after that day the Queen of Sheba watched at her window

for the ships of Solomon, till, above all else, the Name of the Lord took entire hold of her heart. The Queen of Sheba had lords many and gods many of her own. She and her people had their gods of the sea and their gods of the land; their gods of war and their gods of wine; their gods of the night and their gods of the day, and many more. But there was no name of any god given in Sheba that took such hold of the Queen of Sheba's heart as did the Name of the God of Israel. Till she took a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones, there came no such abundance of spices as these which the Queen of Sheba brought to Jerusalem, because of the Name of the Lord.

Even Homer himself was sometimes seen to nod. And that is the explanation of Matthew Henry's unaccountable slander that some of the Queen of Sheba's questions that she put to Solomon, some were frivolous, some were captious, and some were over-curious. I do not see what business the best of commentators has to say that, unless it be to teach us always to read our Bible with our own eyes and with our own hearts for ourselves. And when I read with my own eyes all I can find about the Queen of Sheba, I see neither caption, nor frivolity, nor idle curiosity about her. And I cannot think there could have been, since our Lord sets His seal upon her, and takes her and her questions as His accusation and condemnation of the Pharisees of His day. The sacred writer knew far more about the Queen of Sheba than the minister of Chester

did ; and what he says about her questions is this, that they were hard to Solomon to answer ; especially when she went deep down into her heart for her questions. ‘All that was in her heart.’ I suppose the sacred writer means all matters, or, at least, very many matters connected with the throne and the state of Sheba. Affairs of state, as we would say : her anxieties about her treaties of war and peace ; her seat of judgment and justice over her own people ; royal-family matters also, no doubt ; and matters, maybe, still nearer her heart. The Queen of Sheba had heard in the south country all about Solomon’s dream at Gibcon. She had it all read to her when her royal cares would not let her sleep. And, ever since, she had kept all these things in her heart against her long-intended visit to Jerusalem. But from the day when she first heard the Name of the Lord, from that day her heart had grown every day and every night deeper and fuller of hard questions ; questions so hard that I doubt if she broke them all even to Solomon. At the same time, her heart in Sheba at its fullest of hard questions was not a New Testament heart, and could not in Sheba be. Of no New Testament heart does the New Testament ever say that its owner ever told to any man all that was in her heart ; unless it was to our New Testament Solomon. And, then, He is such a Solomon that He does not need that communication to be made to Him. For He is wiser in men’s hearts than all men ; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman and Chalcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol ; and

His fame is now in all the nations round about. Only, in His wisdom He will have it that we come, if it is from the uttermost part of the earth, and tell Him as if He did not already know all the hard questions of our hearts; and then there will not be anything hid from the King that He will not tell us. Oh no, sacred writer! you do not really mean us to understand that the Queen of Sheba told to any man all that was in her heart. We quite well understand what you mean. She told Solomon so much about herself and about her people, and got so much help and advice from Solomon, that 'all that was in her heart' is just your hyperbolical and impressive way of putting her before us in your great regard for her, and in your great admiration of him.

Matthew Henry is more like himself when he goes on to say that we may be sure that Solomon gave the inquiring Queen a *rationale* of the temple and all its offices and all its services. That is a handsome retractation and apology for what he had said so rashly and so censoriously about the frivolity and the captiousness of the Queen's questions. You could not possibly give a *rationale* of the communion services of this house on a communion Sabbath-day to a frivolous and captious-minded man. Now, the temple was just the Lord's Supper already in type and prophecy. And when you try it, there is no subject in heaven or earth more impossible to rationalise to a frivolous or a captious mind than just what lies behind the Lord's Supper: the substitution and the propitiation made for

sinners by the blood of Christ. The Queen of Sheba was like one of those children in Israel who asked their fathers at every passover supper, What mean ye by this service? Only, she was not a child, but a woman of a strong understanding and a deep heart, and both Solomon and the high priest and the prophet, all three together, were at their wits' end; it took them all their might to open up all the parts of the temple and its sacrifices to her satisfaction: the reason of this, and the reason of that; the use of this, and the use of that; the antitype of this, and the antitype of that—she both hearing them and asking them questions. Till, when they had taken her through it all, there was no more spirit left in her to ask any more. I can believe it. For to this day nothing more completely subdues the spirit than the hard questions of the heart when they are honestly put and fully met and answered in the house of the Lord, and at His table. Nothing satisfies and silences the heart like the *rationale*, that is to say, the revelation of the truth and the grace of God to the heart that is hungry both for His truth as it is in Jesus, and for His grace as it is in Jesus also, and in Jesus alone.

No; there was neither captiousness nor frivolity in the Queen of Sheba when she came out of her own country, and neither was there detraction, nor depreciation, nor envy when she returned home. What say you? Had I been in her place, I do not feel guilty that I would have been either captious or frivolous in the house of God or in Solomon's

own house. But I would have had things in my heart worse than captiousness or frivolousness; things that I would never have told to Solomon, or to Nathan, or even to the high priest over the scapegoat. Had I been a king, and had I been shown through Solomon's temple, and through his palace, and through all that the Queen of Sheba saw in Jerusalem, I know only too well what would have been in my heart. Ay, even when I was being taken over the Lord's house and was being instructed in its sacrifices. Bishop Lancelot Andrewes has no more private devotion than that is where we come upon him praying to God to be delivered from his envy of another man's grace. Oh, where will that sin of sins, that so besetting sin, not intrude itself! If all this good queen's appreciation, and admiration, and congratulation was absolutely sincere and without offence in the sight of God who seeth the heart, well does she deserve all the honour that both the Old Testament and our Lord bestow upon her. Only, Blessed be His name, even if you are sick till you have no spirit left in you at the sight of other men's great houses, and great riches, and wise words, and fame, and great happiness—even so, Blessed be his name, He will not despise you nor spit upon you. He will only take you all that the more and all that the deeper into His temple, and will show you all that the more the riches of His grace, till He has given to you all you desire. And, Lord Jesus, all our desire in this matter is before Thee and is not hidden from Thee. It was a true report, she said, that I heard in mine own land, of thy acts and thy

wisdom. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Only, had she known it, and seen the end of it, she was far more happy herself; as much more happy as it is to be faithful over a few things, and to admire rather than to be admired, and to bless than to be blessed, and to give than to receive.

Returning toward the same south a thousand years after the Queen of Sheba, the Ethiopian eunuch sat in his chariot and read Esaias the prophet. Esaias had not yet risen in the day of the Queen of Sheba; but she had the best reading of her day in her hand as she rode south. She had Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple in her hand. And the place in the prayer which she reads and prays all the way from Jerusalem to the south is this—'Moreover, concerning a stranger, that is not of Thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for Thy Name's sake. For they shall hear of Thy great Name, and of Thy strong hand, and of Thy stretched-out hand. When the stranger shall come and pray toward this house, hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to Thee for, that all people of the earth may know Thy Name, to fear Thee, as do Thy people Israel.' All Ethiopia and all the south has not yet been explored. And who can tell but that the foundations of a long-lost temple may yet be laid bare in that ancient and honourable land; a temple, too, with no middle wall of partition with its excluding inscription en-

graven upon it; but in room of that an open door with this evangelical writing in gold of Ophir over it: 'Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and though Israel acknowledge us not. Thou art our Father. Thou, O Lord, art our Redeemer. THY NAME is from everlasting.' And then this beside it in the same gold from a Psalm for Solomon: 'The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. And He shall live, and to Him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: and blessed be His glorious Name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with His glory.'

XLV

SHIMEI

*AND DAVID SAID, LET HIM
ALONE, LET HIM CURSE*



SHIMEI was a reptile of the royal house of Saul. When Shimei saw David escaping for his life out of Jerusalem, Satan entered into Shimei, and he came forth and cursed at David as he passed by. And he cast stones at David, and cried, Thou bloody man, thou man of Belial, he cried. The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul. Behold, thou art taken in thy wickedness, because thou art a bloody man. Why should that dead dog curse the king in that way? said Abishai to David. Let me go over and take off his head. But the king answered to Abishai, So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. And still as David went on his way, Shimei also went along on the hillside over against David, and he cursed as he went, and he threw stones at David and cast dust. But David held his peace; for David had said to Abishai, It is the Lord.

Political and ecclesiastical party spirit turn us all, on occasion, into reptiles like Shimei. Shimei

knew as well as you do that David had never shed a single drop of Saul's blood. So far from that, David's men were astonished and offended at David that he had let Saul go scot-free again and again when he had him in his power. And Shimei knew that quite well. But Shimei hated the truth that he knew. It was not Shimei's interest to admit the truth that he knew. He would not let the truth light on his mind for one moment, especially about David. Nothing was right that David did. Everything was wrong that David had any hand in. If you had a word to say for David, Shimei would follow you about also with curses and stones and dust. Shimei had everything to expect from Saul, and he knew that he had nothing to expect from David; and, therefore, David was a bloody man and a son of Belial. You know Shimei. At any rate, all who know you intimately know Shimei. Charity seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. But you never yet knew a fierce political or ecclesiastical partisan who had charity. When our political and ecclesiastical partisans begin to have charity we shall no longer need to offer the Lord's prayer every day, and say, Thy kingdom come.

Abishai looked up and saw a dead dog barking and biting out of his own kennel-door in Bahurim that day. But it was the Lord to David. David had nothing to do with the fall of Saul on Mount Gilboa; but the fall of Uriah in the front of the battle before Rabbah was ever before David, and

never more so than it was that day as he crossed the Kedron, and passed through Gethsemane, and descended upon Bahurim. So let him curse, for the Lord hath said to him, Curse David. To such a divine use was Shimei put of God that greatest day of David's life. For Shimei that day perfected the good work on David that Absalom and Ahithophel had so well begun. Shimei was David's crowning means of grace that day. That day adorns and seals all David's psalms, and it was Shimei that did it. David had only to point with his finger to the hillside, and Shimei's insult and injury would have ceased for ever. But what profit would Shimei's blood have been to David? David had more sense. David had more grace. David knew himself better than that. And he knew God better than that. There is a Shimei that you wish he were dead. He is such a trial and torment to you. He so hampers and hinders you. He is such a rival to you. He is such a thorn in your pillow, and such a crook in your lot, and such a cross on which you are crucified, and are to be crucified, every day you live. You count up how old he is, and you promise yourself to have so many years of relief and enjoyment after he is in his grave. Oh no! Oh no! Let him live. Let his doctor lengthen his days. Let his bow long abide in its strength. Let him see all the days of his fathers. Let him close your eyes. Let him stand over your grave. Let him inherit your substance. Let him live long after you and rejoice in your portion. For it is the Lord. It is your salvation. And who, then, shall

say to the Lord, Why hast Thou done this? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus? O the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counsellor?

Now, what is true of bad men is equally true of all our other bad surroundings, and all our other adverse circumstances, as we call them. For they also are all set of God, and kept of God, and made of God to operate on us for a good use. God sets to each one of us all the special surroundings, good and evil, of our several lives. It is too high for us to attain to and to understand. How He can do that to you, and to me, and to all other men, as much as to you and me, that surpasses us. But over-work and difficulty and impossibility are only true of men; they are not true of God. The Divine Nature is not like human nature; at least, not in things like that. God is everywhere, and He is wholly everywhere; and all His power, and all His wisdom, and all His grace, and all His truth, are with, and for, and around, and within every man. And thus it is that He sets every man's circumstances to him, good and bad, as much and as well as if He had no other man on His hand in earth or in heaven. When Almighty God creates another soul; when He elects to eternal life another new sinner; when He regenerates and begins to sanctify another new saint, He, from that moment, besets him behind and before, and lays His hand upon him. And when

we awake to all that, we fall in with it all with unceasing wonder and with unceasing thanksgiving. O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. Whither shall I flee from Thy Spirit? How precious, also, are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! He believes nothing who does not believe that. He knows nothing who does not know that. He has not begun to live who lives not always under that. And he will soon come to see God in everything that befalls him; and not God only, but God his Sanctifier and his Saviour. And then he will not let one atom of his most adverse circumstances be altered, lest he should thereby lose something of his full salvation. And when any of his friends, for his protection, or for his peace, or for his comfort would fain remove out of his life aught that tempts and tries him; aught that tramples on him and humbles him; aught that plagues him and vexes him and leads him into sin, like David to Abishai at Bahurim he says to him, Let it alone, for it is the Lord. You say to me rare things about design, and adaptation, and environment, and means to ends, and final causes, and what not; and you both astonish and edify me. But if you fear God, and come, I will tell you how He environs my soul, and how He adapts you and all you say and do, to the good of my soul. If you could see and study my soul, even as I see it and study it, you would see something to make a science out of it. You would see a design and an end and a final cause,

the greatest and the best—your soul under sanctification and mine—a final cause and an end next to God Himself. You would see all things in my world and in my generation, all working together upon me for my good. And all so secretly, so exquisitely, so intricately, so surely, and so infallibly working together of God. No. If you love my soul and its salvation, you must not alter by a single hair's breadth any single thing of all my circumstances; not, at least, till you are sure that I have got its divine end and design out of it. Especially not my trying, and tempting, and searching, and sifting, and sanctifying circumstances. And least of all Absalom and Abithophel and Shimei. Every hour of every day; every man I meet; every word that enters my ear; every sight that enters my eye; all my thoughts within me that like a case of knives wounds my heart—it is all the Lord! If this life were all, then, I admit, it might be different. If you denied the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul, then I could understand you. But I cannot understand a man who believes in the sanctification and the eternal life of his own soul escaping the only and sure path of life like that. It is the Lord, and He is set upon my salvation. He is set upon my humility, my submissiveness, my meekness, my gentleness, my resignation, my contentment, my detachment, my self-denial, my cross, my death to sin, my death to myself, my unearthliness, my heavenly-mindedness, my conformity to Christ, and my acceptance of Him—and what a splendid use

is all that to which to put all the things that otherwise would be so much against me! And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Let this Benjamite alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon mine affliction. And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went on the hill's side over against David, and cursed David, and threw stones at him, and cast dust.

The magnificent use to which God puts the greatest of all His people's evils must not be attempted before a common congregation. Had we an elect-enough and a sympathetic-enough audience, this would make a splendid subject for the evening of the Lord's day. But we would need to have before us only the heavenly-minded, and the much-exercised, and the teachable, and the child-like; while all the frivolous and the captious, and all those given to disputes and debates about divine things should stay at home. There are plenty of materials for this great head of our subject lying scattered over the whole face of Holy Scripture. And the great masters have sometimes taken up this subject, after Holy Scripture. Samuel Rutherford, for example, comes often upon it in his Letters and in all his books. But after he has said all that it is possible to say upon it, he exclaims, Oh! what a deep is here, that created wit cannot take up! Jonathan Edwards takes it up with all his matchless wit in his fine letter to Thomas Gillespie of Carnock, and elsewhere in his golden works. And what do you say to Shakespeare himself?

O benefit of ill ! now I find true
That better is by evil still made better !
And ruined love, when it is built anew,
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.
So I return rebuked to my content,
And gain by ill thrice more than I have spent.

And then, of death, the wages of sin. Can any good be said of death ? Yes ; by the proper man.

Death,' says Thomas Shepard, 'is the very best of all our gospel ordinances. For in all His other ordinances Christ comes, on occasion, to us ; but in a believer's death Christ takes us to be for ever with Him.' A fair specimen of Shepard. And, to bind up this bold anthology with George Herbert :

Death, thou wert once an uncouth, hideous thing,
Nothing but bones.
But since our Saviour's death did put some blood
Into thy face ;
Thou art grown fair and full of grace,
Much in request, much sought for as a good.

This brings us to David's deathbed ; and David's deathbed has never been without its own difficulties to thoughtful and reverential readers. For Shimei with all his good and all his bad uses comes back again to David's deathbed to tempt and to try David, and to discover what is in David's dying heart. The deathbed sayings of God's saints have a special interest and a delightful edification to us ; but David's last words to Solomon about Shimei—we would pass them by if we could. Three or four several explanations of those terrible words of David have been offered to the distressed reader by able

men and men of authority in such matters. I shall only mention some of those offered explanations, and leave you to judge for yourselves. Well, some students of the Old Testament are bold to take David's dreadful words about Shimei out of David's mouth altogether, and to put them into the mouth of the prophet who has preserved to us David's life and death. Those awful words, they say, are that righteous prophet's explanation and vindication of the too late execution of Shimei by Solomon after his reprieve had come to an end with the death of David. Others, again, and they, too, some of our most conservative and orthodox scholars, say to us that the text should run in English in this way: 'Hold him not guiltless; at the same time bring *not* his hoar head down to the grave with blood.' You will blame me for my too open ear to such bold scholarship; and you will think it very wrong in me to listen to such bad men. But the heart has its reasons, as Pascal says, and my heart would stretch a considerable point in textual criticism to get Shimei's blood wiped off David's deathbed. Another interpretation is to take the text as it stands, and to hear David judicially charging Solomon about a case of too long delayed justice against a blasphemer of God and the king. And then the last explanation is the most painful one of all, and it is this, that David had never really and truly, and at the bottom of his heart, forgiven Shimei for his brutality and malignity at Bahurim. And that all David's long-suppressed revenge rushed out of his heart against his old enemy when he lay

on his bed and went back on the day on which he had fled from Jerusalem. You can choose your own way of looking at David's deathbed. But, in any case, it is Bahurim that we shall all carry home, and carry for ever henceforth, in our hearts. We shall have, God helping us, David's Bahurim-mind always in us henceforth amid all those who insult and injure us, and say all manner of evil against us falsely ; and amid all manner of adverse and sore circumstances, so as to see the Lord in it all, and so as to work out our salvation amid it all. And the Lord will look upon our affliction also, and will requite us good for all this evil, if only we wisely and silently and adoringly submit ourselves to it.

XLVI

JOAB

*AND DAVID SAID, I AM WEAK THIS
DAY THOUGH ANOINTED KING*



JOAB, the son of David's sister, was a man of the very foremost ability. Had it not been for David, Joab would have climbed up into the throne of Israel. As it was, he stood on the steps of the throne and faced the king all his days. Notwithstanding their family relationship, David and Joab were much of an age, and that, no doubt, helps to account for a good deal that went on between the uncle and the nephew. Joab was a stern, haughty, imperious, revengeful man. His only virtue was a certain proud, patronising loyalty to his king. Joab's ambition might surely have been satisfied, for he was in more respects than one the most privileged man in the land. Even the king himself was afraid of his commander-in-chief. The sovereign took his orders meekly from his subject. After his own contemptuous way, Joab was always true to David. That is to say, he made short work with any one else who was false to David. And he performed some splendid services both as a soldier and a

statesman in the extension and consolidation of David's kingdom. In his own well-read and picturesque way, Dean Stanley describes Joab very aptly as the Marlborough of the empire of Israel.

Over-ambition, to put it all in one word, was Joab's besetting sin ; over-vaulting ambition. But what more would Joab have had? you may well ask. Only, do not ask that any more about Joab, or about any other ambitious and self-seeking man. Look into your own heart and answer. If you look well into your own heart, you will see there that as long as any one else has anything at all of his own, it does not matter how much you have. Joab was king in all but the crown. King, and more. But as long as his weaker uncle wore the crown, Joab's heart raged like hell. Jonathan gave over to David all that he possessed, and all that he ever expected to possess, and died a king. Joab envied David and every one else all that they had, and died an outcast. Pride, jealousy, malignity, revenge, assassination, with now and then a gleam of satanic loyalty lighting up his terrible heart—such is the son of Zeruiah. The land trembles as Joab rises on the stepping-stones of murdered men to the shining top of power and honour, only to fall under the sword of a too-slow justice an outlaw from the love and the pity of all men.

David was all heart, and passion, and sensibility ; while Joab was all self-will, and pride, and as hard as a stone. David's sudden and unparalleled exaltation was never forgiven him at home. His brothers and his sisters were sufficiently proud of David

toward all their neighbours; at the same time they could never enough let him see how much they thought themselves as good as he was when they were alone together. But it was Joab who carried all that to a head. David and Joab were by far the ablest members of a very able household; but David was hampered with his heart, till Joab, having no heart, got the mastery. And thus it is that, already, and before David has well sat down on the throne, we hear him saying such things as these: 'The sons of Zeruiah,' David burst out, 'be too hard for me. I am this day weak, though anointed king.' And you may be sure that when that so unkingly speech was reported to the sons of Zeruiah, it did not make them any the less hard for David. Joab's temper was not any sweeter, nor his hand any lighter, after that and many suchlike deplorably foolish speeches of David. Already David lay and writhed in a net of ten thousand invisible threads and stings; and a chain of iron is soon to be forged for David by his own besotted hands. Men of much heart are always men of much mischief to themselves and to other men. To keep much of a heart with all diligence every moment—what a superhuman task is that! To keep much of a heart, to keep it in, to keep it down, to keep it open, but not too open—who is sufficient for these things? David yielded to Joab out of simple good-nature yesterday, and again to-day, and he will yield something far more important to-morrow, and so on. Each time he yields it is an act of rare courtesy, fine consideration, and most beautiful

good-feeling and good-will—all touched, at the same time, with a certain tincture of fear. In any other world but this, and to any other man but Joab, David's heart would be an open heaven. But as it is, David wakens up too late to find out that he is king in nothing but in name. Neither his royal word, nor his personal liberty, nor his children, nor his tears over his dead children, are his own. Such is the mischief of too much heart and too little will in one member of a family, and too little heart and too much will in another. Let both look at David and Joab, and learn, and lay to heart. For we are all in this world, and in families, for this end, to learn how to rule our hearts; now to reduce and now to enlarge; now to harden and now to soften our hearts. The heart is the man. In this world, and in the world to come, the heart alone is the man. And we are in this world and in its families to make ourselves an everlasting heart.

‘It is worse than a crime,’ says an astute politician, ‘it is a blunder.’ And though it was a clear enough crime in David to pass by Joab's murder of Abner, it came out afterwards to be a most terrible blunder. All David's after-life might well have been different but for that blunder. There might have been no ‘matter of Uriah,’ and no rebellion of Absalom, and none of the many other miseries that so desolated David's house, had he not committed this fatal blunder of letting Joab live. David knew his duty quite well. ‘The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness,’ David proclaimed over Abner's mangled body. Yes; but

David held the sword for no other purpose than to be the Lord's right hand in rewarding all the evil that was done in Israel in his day. But, then, Joab was the most powerful and the most necessary man in Israel, and Abner had no friends, and David contented himself with pronouncing an eloquent requiem over Abner, and leaving his murderer to go free in all his offices and all his honours. Joab was deep enough to understand quite well why his life was spared. He knew quite well that it was fear and not love that had moved David to let him live. It was a diplomatic act of David to spare Joab, but David was playing with a far deeper diplomatist than himself. Very soon we shall see this respited assassin ordering David about and dictating to him, till we shall pity David as well as blame him. Joab's impunity speedily shot up into an increased contempt for David, till secret contempt became open insolence, and open insolence open and unavenged rebellion. Was it not a blunder?

In the corrupted currents of this world,
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen, the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law : but 'tis not so above ;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature ; and we ourselves compell'd,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence.

‘And it came to pass in the morning that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter saying: Thou shalt set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle,

and retire from him, that he may be smitten and die.' That dreadful letter shows us David's desperation, indeed; but it shows us also David's estimate of Joab. Had Jonathan been spared to be second to David this would never have happened. David would never have dared to send such a letter as that to Jonathan. But Jonathan was taken and Joab was left, and David had Joab for his tool to impress on our hearts the terrible portent of a bloodstained holiness. But how could Joab have the utter depravity and the cold blood to do it? you ask. How could he plan an attack, and sham a retreat, and risk a defeat, and all to murder a noble, spotless, unsuspecting comrade? It was not soldierly obedience. Joab did not care one straw for the king's letter. When it suited him, Joab could tear up the king's letters and throw them in his face. Unless you can tell us, we shall never in this world know why Joab murdered Uriah after that letter. Unless you are astute enough, and wicked enough, and then honest enough to tell us, we shall not know till the day of judgment what all passed through Joab's heart when he read that letter, and read it again with his glancing eyes. Joab had some sufficient motive for following out David's detestable orders. But unless you find out Joab's motive among your own motives, we shall have to leave him alone. It was like Pilate and the chief priests with our Lord between them. They also had their motives. Only, their motives are as plain as day, while Joab was a deep man—deeper, quite possibly, than any man here. And it came to pass that, when

Joab observed the city, he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were on the wall. And Uriah fell. And David said to Joab's messenger, Let not this thing displease thee. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord. And the Lord had Joab in His hand henceforth as the rod of his displeasure, and Joab had David's letter in his hand till, if there is a man on the face of the earth to be pitied from that time forward, it is David.

Better a living dog than a dead lion. David was the first lion of the tribe of Judah, and it is sad to see how his teeth and his claws were broken, and his sinews cut, by his tormentors. You are but a dog beside David. Only, you have this, that you are still alive, and young, and free, and unsold as yet, whereas David is dead. You are too young to have written any letters yet worth any one keeping. 'Destroy this letter as soon as you have read it,' David wrote at the top of it. 'Under the strictest seal of secrecy, and on the king's own business,' Uriah read on the envelope, and handed it with all speed and respect to his chief. 'Read and burn instantly,' wrote David in state cipher. But Joab was not the man to throw an autograph letter of the king into the fire. Joab recollected what prices such letters bring in the auction rooms, and, instead of burning David's letter, he folded it carefully, and buttoned it up in his breast-pocket. That letter was still deep down in Joab's breast-pocket when Benaiah at David's demand fell upon him and slew him in spite of the horns of the altar. You

are still in your innocence, and have written no letters. And were you my only son, may I bury you first before you write your first letter to Joab.

Tool turned tyrant—that shortly sums up Joab and David for the next thirty years. Only an insult here and a humiliation there has been preserved to us out of the daily insults and humiliations that Joab heaped upon David. Joab had no more pity than a tiger, and the tiger's claws were never out of David's flesh from the matter of Uriah down to David's death. David had said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan had said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die. But David had far better have died and been buried beside his sin. Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God; Thou wast a God that forgavest them, but Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions. And Joab was just the instrument to glut himself in the divine vengeance. 'Joab insolently falls foul of David,' is one of Matthew Henry's plain-spoken remarks. And again, 'He calls David a fool to his face.' We have only one in a thousand of Joab's insolent speeches to David's face. But the sacred writer surely selects and preserves his very best instance of tool turned tyrant and his insolent speech, in the case of Absalom. Joab ran Absalom three times through the heart right in the teeth of David's command to spare and save Absalom alive. And then, when David broke out in that terrible sorrow which sounds in our hearts to this day, Joab would not have it. There has been enough weeping

now for Absalom, said Joab to David. Let there be no more. And David dried his eyes on the spot like a cowed child, and turned to the business of the kingdom, cursing Joab all the time in his heart. It was David's sad case that made our Lord say in David's city a thousand years after, Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And all Scripture is full of the same warning. Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey? For of whom a man is overcome, of the same he is brought in bondage. All this of David and Joab is only the life of some of ourselves sold for nought, and written out with all plainness of speech, and put of God into our hands.

I have been sorely tempted to take up the mystical interpretation of Shimei and Joab. Those two Scripture characters so lend themselves to the mystical method. Those two thorns in David's flesh—and there are more like them—so suit into the secretest depths of our own spiritual experience. Those two bad men were, each in his own wicked way, of such rich and indispensable use to David, if David was to be searched out, hunted down, laid low, and saved at last. They so struck in, made of God and kept of God for the very purpose, to tempt, and to vex, and to humiliate, and to weaken, and to keep broken David's broken heart. They, Joab especially, were ever with David. Joab with his insolence, and his cruelty, and his family familiarity, and his equality in years, and all that eating in and growing, on to David's deathbed—I declare it is

another parable of that cunning Nathan, and not a true and honest history at all! It is a subtle allegory all the time; and that, too, of our own life. Yes, that is it. It is my life and yours; if your life is at all like mine, or is going to be, you who are yet young. It is our own life under sin, as Paul says, and under grace. Under forgiveness, and then under vengeance, as David says, and had such a good right to say. Only, come, all ye who would learn beforehand the ways of God, and we will tell you as good as anything that ever was told even of David. As good. As sad. As painful. As awful. And still more amazing in its grace. Shimei cursing and throwing stones. Joab, first tool and then ever after tyrant. We will show you such a letter. A sackful of such letters. And the writer of them walking softly, and never ceasing from prayer and tears on account of them all his days. O sacred chronicler, look well to your laurels! If once we take pen in hand, where would you be—Shimei, and Joab, and Absalom, and Ahithophel and all! O Lord, open Thou my lips, and I will show forth Thy praise. Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee. Thou art my hiding-place; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of men. Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.

XLVII

ABSALOM

*I WILL RAISE UP EVIL AGAINST
THEE OUT OF THINE OWN HOUSE*



POLYGAMY is just Greek for a dung-hill. David trampled down the first and the best law of nature in his palace in Jerusalem, and for his trouble he spent all his after-days in a hell upon earth. David's palace was a perfect pandemonium of suspicion, and intrigue, and jealousy, and hatred—all breaking out, now into incest and now into murder. And it was in such a household, if such a cesspool could be called a household, that Absalom, David's third son by his third living wife, was born and brought up. But be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a patriarch, or a prophet, or a psalmist soweth, that shall he also reap. For he, saint or sinner, that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.

Maachah, Absalom's mother, was the daughter of a king. And this, taken together with his distinguished appearance and his princely manners, gave Absalom the pre-eminence over all his brethren. Absalom inherited all the handsomeness, manly bearing, and beauty of his father's

handsome and manly house. The sacred writer expatiates with evident relish upon Absalom's extraordinary beauty. In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty. From the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And the hair of his head is a proverb to this day.

A little ring of jealous and scheming parasites, all hateful and hating one another, collected round each one of David's wives. And it was in one of the worst of those wicked little rings that Absalom grew up and got his education. Absalom had a sister, named Tamar, who was as beautiful as a woman as Absalom was as a man. And how her beauty became the occasion of her ruin in that horrible household the sacred historian tells us with sufficient plainness of speech. Suffice it here to say that Absalom determined, sooner or later, to wash off his sister's terrible wrongs in the blood of the wrongdoer. And, then, as the divine vengeance would have it to be, that wrongdoer to one of David's fairest daughters was one of David's favourite sons. The Septuagint frankly tells us that David loved the wrongdoer so much that he could not so much as rebuke him for his brutality. But, after giving his father two full years to avenge his sister's ruin, Absalom took the law into his own hand till Amnon fell, when his heart was merry with wine, under Absalom's revengeful sword. And, then, all the plots and counter-plots connected with Absalom's revenge, and flight, and restoration, and too-late reconciliation to his father; his deep-laid schemes

to wrench the kingdom out of his father's hands; and then his defeat and murder by Joab—all that, if we have the courage to look at it, will give us a picture of the men and the times, humiliating beyond all words, and never to be forgotten. David and his wives and concubines and mixed-up children, Tamar and her half-brother Amnon, Absalom and Jonadab, Joab and the wise woman of Tekoa, Ittai and Shimei, Ahithophel and Hushai, and the righteousness and the grace of God reigning over them all. Truly, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

It is this so terrible plain-spokenness of the Bible that makes it so precious to all who are in earnest about themselves and their children. Had this sacred writer not been in earnest in his work, we should have had an altogether different David. And we make an altogether different David to ourselves in spite of the sacred writer, and in spite of all that David himself can say and do. The David that we set up for ourselves has always a halo round his head and a harp in his hand, and his eyes fixed on the heavens. We are willingly ignorant that David had ever any other wife but Solomon's mother, as also that she had ever any other son but Solomon. And, then, our Solomon is always dreaming his dream at Gibeon, and when he is not choosing wisdom for himself he is always writing inspired proverbs about wisdom for his son.

While all the time David prevents the night-watches with psalms like this: I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no thing of Belial before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me, and so on. A David like that in our Bible would have delighted us, and would not have offended and shocked us. No. But then neither would he have been of any real use to us when we went to our Bible for real use. It is when we go to our Bible for real use, for the experiences of men of like passions with ourselves, it is then that we discover and see the pen of God in the Bible life of David. And it is from that pen that I gather these closing lessons out of the life of David and out of the death of Absalom.

‘The inconceivable evil of sensuality’ was surely never more awfully burned in upon any sinful house than it was upon David’s house. David himself is a towering warning to all men, and especially to all godly men against this master abomination. And, all the more that he sinned so terribly against such singular grace. David, to use his own words, was as white as snow as long as he was young, and poor, and struggling up, and oppressed, and persecuted, and with Samuel’s horn of oil still sanctifying all the thoughts and all the imaginations of his heart. But no sooner had David sat down on the throne of Israel than his life of sin and shame began. And all the woe upon woe of his after-life, almost every single

deadly drop of it, came down out of that day when he first introduced open and unblushing sensuality into his palace in Jerusalem. There was military success, and extended empire, and great wealth, and great and far-sounding glory in David's day in Israel; but beneath it all the whole ground was mined and filled to the lip with gunpowder, and the divine tinder all the time was surely burning its way to the divine vengeance on David's house. Our doctors, our lawyers, our ministers, and many of ourselves, will all subscribe to Newman's strong words in one of his sermons—'The inconceivable evil of sensuality.'

You sometimes hear speak about the historical imagination, and the right and the fruitful uses of the historical imagination. Well, here is the history of young Absalom, and you must bring your imagination to bear upon it. You must read all the chapters about David's manner of life in Jerusalem, and all the chapters in which Absalom's name comes up, and then you must imagine yourself to be Absalom, and to be in his place. I dare not put in words what you will see when you read Second Samuel with your eye upon the object. For one thing, Absalom did not see his father David at all as we see him. He saw him as his enemies then saw him, and as infidels and scoffers see him now. It was impossible that Absalom could look on his father with our admiring eyes. 'It helped me, too,' says Santa Teresa in her happy 'Life of Herself'; 'It helped me much that I never saw my father and my mother respect anything but goodness.'

‘It poisoned me at my father,’ said Absalom to Ahithophel; ‘the life we all led in our several stews.’ Yes, polygamy is indeed a dunghill. Only, it is a dunghill with hell at the heart of it. We have nothing like the city of David on this side the Dardanelles. And no real lesson for our day and our household can be got out of Absalom’s early life. Unless it is that far-fetched lesson to that fatal house where there is a father who is no father. And to that house where the father and the mother are full of divided lives, divided interests, divided counsels, divided tastes, and divided desires for themselves and their children. The sons and the daughters of such divided fathers and mothers will need neither history nor imagination to see and to feel with poor Absalom. Only, this lesson to such fathers and mothers is all but too late and irrecoverable.

The Hebrew Bible for some unaccountable reason is silent where the Greek Bible speaks out boldly about David, and delivers a great lesson to all of us who are fathers. The law of Moses was plain. It is to be read in the Book of Leviticus to this day. ‘It is a wicked thing. And he that does it shall be cut off in the sight of all the people. He shall bear his iniquity.’ Well, Amnon did it. Amnon was worse than if he had been the actual murderer of his own sister. But what do we read on this matter in the Septuagint? We literally read this: ‘Notwithstanding Amnon’s sin David did not trouble the spirit of Amnon his son, because he loved him, and because he was his first-born.’

But, not to trouble the spirit of your son for his sin is to trouble other people's spirit all his days, ay, and your own spirit and his too, to the bargain. The Greek Bible has recovered for us one of the lost links in David's downward career, and in the downward career of Absalom his son. For it was David's unwillingness to trouble Amnon that made Absalom in the cause of his sister first a murderer, and then a conspirator, and then, after a life of terrible trouble, himself a mangled corpse under the revengeful and murderous hands of Joab, that other arch-troubler of Israel. 'Praise them openly, reprehend them secretly,' is the second of Lord Burleigh's ten precepts to his son concerning his children. But David did the very opposite of that with Absalom. All Jerusalem heard David for two years reprehending his half-pardoned son Absalom openly, till Absalom was exasperated out of all endurance, and till the last link of sonship was broken for ever between David and Absalom.

But, with all that, it is the terrible cry that comes out of the chamber over the gate of Mahanaim that makes the name of Absalom so well known and so full of the most terrible lessons to us. 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!' Yes, that is love, no doubt. That is the love of a broken-hearted father, no doubt. But the pang of the cry, the innermost agony of the cry, the poisoned point of the dagger in that cry is remorse. I have slain my son! I have murdered my son with my own hands! I neglected my son Absalom from a

child! With my own lusts I laid his very worst temptation right in his way. It had been better Absalom had never been born! If he rebelled, who shall blame him? I, David, drove Absalom to rebellion. It was his father's hand that stabbed Absalom through the heart. O Absalom, my murdered son! Would God thy murderer had been in thy place this day. And the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!

Come all you who are fathers and mothers, come to the chamber over the gate of Mahanaim, and let us take counsel together as to how we are to bring up our children to virtue and godliness and everlasting life. Let us read all Holy Writ on this subject together; and after Holy Writ, all other good and true books that in any way bear upon this supreme subject. Let us set ourselves to gather together all our experience and all our observation, and let us counsel and correct and comfort one another concerning this one thing that we do, our children. Let us take time to it, and pains, and pursue it until we succeed in it. Let us search the Scriptures up to the top and down to the bottom for this pearl of great price. Let us set on one side all the fathers and mothers in Israel to whom God hath ever said, I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him. And then let us set on the other side David and all those fathers and mothers

on whom God took vengeance, and said, Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house. I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house. Let us collect into a secret and solemn book all such instances ; and let us, husband and wife, minister and people, and one anxious parent with another, let us meet together, and confer together, and pray together, saying, This one thing will we do. Why do men and women combine and consult together about everything else but the thing in which so many are so ignorant, so stupid, and so full of fatal mistakes ? If we asked our happy neighbours, they would surely tell us the secret of their success in their children. How did they come so well and so soon to understand their children ? How early did they discover what manner of heart was already in their children ? And at what age did they begin to deal with the hearts of their children ? What amount of time did they set aside and keep sacred for reflection and for prayer to God for their child ; naming their child and describing him ; and how did God's answer begin to show itself first in the parents and then in the child ? When did your child first begin to show some sure signs of saving grace ? And how did that grace show itself to your satisfaction and thanksgiving ; first in one child and then in another ? Tell us about the Sabbath—how it was observed, occupied, and sanctified as your children grew up ? About the church also and the Sabbath-school ? About the books that were read on Sabbath-days and week days ; both by your children alone and of

their own accord, as also with you all reading together ; one reading and all the rest listening ? Things like that. All that you can tell us about such children as yours will be eagerly listened to and attended to. What priceless stores of experience, and observation, and success and defeat are lost all around us just because we do not speak more to one another about our ways with our children ; our hopes and our fears ; our neglects and our recoveries of neglects ; the things that one household is so happy in, and the same things that cause such unavailing remorse in another household. Yes, this whole matter must surely be collected together and made into a science soon, and taught in every true church to every young father and young mother as their very life.

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